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THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE
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THE MAYFLOWER
MEXICO IN REVOLUTION
THE SHADOW OF THE CATHEDRAL
THE TORRENT
WOMAN TRIUMPHANT
THE LAND OF ART
ALFONSO XIII UNMASKED
THE MAD VIRGINS (AND OTHER STORIES)

THE MOB

BY

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Translated from the Spanish

BY

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THE MOB

CHAPTER I

ABOUT three o'clock in the morning the first carts from the sierra began to arrive on the Cuatro Caminos octroi. Loaded with milk cans, they had started from Colmenar about nine o'clock, driving all night in an icy rain that seemed the last farewell of winter. The drivers wanted to reach Madrid before day-break in order to be the first to arrive at the weighing office. The vehicles lined themselves up along the road, and the animals stood patiently in the rain that dripped from their ears, their tails, and their harness. The drivers took shelter in a neighbouring tavern—the only open door in all the Cuatro Caminos district—and inhaled deeply the air which had been made stale by the respiration of the customers on the previous night. They removed their caps to shake the water off, dropped the mud from their heavy hob-nailed shoes on the floor, and, while sipping a cup of coffee with a few drops of *aguardiente*, discussed with the landlady the lunch she was to prepare for them at eleven o'clock, when they would be on their way back to their village.

At the drinking trough, next to the octroi office, several ox-carts, loaded with tree trunks, awaited the arrival of day to enter the city. The drivers slept under the carts,wrapped up in their blankets, and oxen, freed from the yoke, lay flat on the ground, their legs curled up under their bellies, chewing untiringly their dry fodder in front of the panniers.

Life began to awaken at the Cuatro Caminos. Several doors creaked, throwing a patch of reddish light on the mud of the road. From a near-by *churrería* came the pungent

stench of fried oil. In the taverns, the sleepy waiters lined up on a table near the entrance, the purveyors of their morning "poison"—square flasks of *aguardiente* with herbs and slices of lemon.

Shivering with cold, the first early-risers appeared, and, after gulping down a glass of *aguardiente* or a penny cup of coffee, continued on their way towards Madrid under the feeble light of the gas lamps. The octroi office had just opened and the drivers crowded around the scales. The tin cans shone in long rows under the shelter at the entrance. The men shouted, arguing about their turn.

"Who's ahead of me?" yelled a driver as he came up to take his turn.

And as someone announced his position, the new arrival set down his cans next and took up his place in the line, ready to defend himself with his whip from any possible intruder.

They all displayed great haste to be admitted into the city and harried the weigher and the other employees with entreaties while they, enveloped in their cloaks, wrote in the light of a kerosene lamp. The cans were filled to only half their capacity. While some drivers waited at the octroi, others proceeded towards Madrid with empty cans in search of the nearest fountain. There, within the limits of the city and without fear of being taxed, they administered the "baptism" and thus increased their merchandise considerably.

The carts from the sierra, large, with heavy wheels and black awnings, were beginning to file towards the city, pitching along the road like sombre ships in the night. Other carts, much smaller, squeezed between them and passed before the octroi without stopping. These vehicles, open boxes drawn by small donkeys, belonged to the rag-dealers. Their owners lay at the bottom of the carts, continuing their sleep, perfectly confident in the knowledge that Bravo Murillo Street was absolutely free from tramway cars at that hour. At times, a donkey, imitating its master, stopped and stood still, with drooping ears, as if sleeping, until a pull on the reins and an oath woke him up.

The rain ceased at daybreak. A violet light filtered through the clouds that floated by very low, as if they were going to touch the roofs. The buildings, damp and glistening from the recent rain, slowly emerged from the morning mist, and presently appeared the muddy ground with big pools of water, the clearings in the neighbouring woods, with the yellow earth stained by green patches of vegetation in the hollows.

Upon a height the Cemetery of San Martin displayed its romantic agglomeration of erect cypresses. The Protestant School raised its pile of red brick over the miserable houses. Along Bravo Murillo Street the interminable row of electric posts stood out—the line of white crosses flanked by two rows of small trees—and at the bottom, sunk in a valley, lay Madrid, wrapped up in the fog of the dawn, the roofs of its houses on a level with the ground, and above them the red spire of Santa Cruz with its white crown.

As the day advanced, the stream of carts and animals towards the crossing of Cuatro Caminos increased considerably. They came from Fuencarral, from Alcobendas or from Colmenar with fresh produce for the city's markets. Next to the milk cans, baskets of eggs covered with straw, cheeses, clusters of chickens and domestic rabbits were unloaded at the octroi office. In filthy promiscuity, one sort of food succeeded another upon the scales platform. Tender lambs, their throats cut and their wool stained with dried blood, were followed a few minutes after, by piles of cheeses and baskets of greens. Wrapped up in their shawls, their kerchiefs tightly tied around their temples, the country women reloaded their merchandise in the panniers, and stepping on the scales with their muddy shoes nimbly jumped on their donkeys and urged them at a trot towards Madrid, to sell their eggs and greens in the streets near by the markets.

The invasion of rag-dealers increased in volume as the day advanced. Their light carts, shaped like boxes, were painted an intense blue, with a red disc upon which was inscribed the owner's name. They came from Bellevista and from Teturan, from the districts called Almenara,

Frajana and Carolinas. The poorer ones, who did not own a cart, rode their small donkeys, their legs sticking inside the large panniers destined to receive the pickings from the rubbish heaps. The women pickers, the corners of their red neckerchiefs waving at their backs, rode erect, urging their donkeys along with sticks wielded by black hands laden with a double row of imitation rings, shining like African ornaments. Their faces were smeared with grease, their eyes were blear from alcohol.

In a procession that displayed their different degrees of misery the donkeys, faithful companions of the rag-pickers, went by dragging the boxes or trotting under the blows of the Amazons. Small, dirty animals, their cunning was almost human. Only rarely were they allowed to pasture ; they ate in their mangers the chick-peas left over from the " cocidos " in Madrid. The civilized food, which had passed through the kitchens of the city the previous day, seemed to sharpen their intelligence. Never had they felt the refreshing contact of the shears nor the beneficent caress of the curry-comb. Their hide was one enormous scab ; although their backs had not the vestige of a hair, their forelegs were covered with long wool that made them look as if they were wearing trousers.

Riders and carts passed on endlessly, like a prehistoric horde fleeing with Hunger at their heels, their eager desire to live guiding them onwards. The animals trotted and tried to pass each other, as if they could smell under the mass of roofs that closed the horizon the remains of a whole day of civilized existence, the offal of the great city that fed the wretches camped in its neighbourhood.

A mob of pedestrians, the residents of the district, workmen on their way to Madrid, invaded the road, coming out from the streets next to Estrecho and Punta Brava, from all sides of Cuatro Caminos, from the miserable hovels of the district, with their gloomy corridors and their numbered doors, veritable wasp-nests of poverty.

The country carts, with their rough solidity which reminded one of the robust, healthy life of the peasants, had ceased arriving. The street was now entirely occupied

by the rag-pickers' vehicles, sordid, dirty, black, some like coffins, with awnings made of discarded wax-cloth. Along the pavements groups of workmen sauntered, some with white jackets, their lunch-bags hanging from one of the buttons, others with brown coats, their caps pulled down over their eyes. From the octroi office one could see them disappearing, hands in their pockets, their backs bent over in a humble attitude, resigned to endure the remainder of a life without hopes or surprises, knowing beforehand the monotonous grey toil that would be their lot until the day of their death.

Others, dressed in blue cloth, with black caps and wearing watches, gathered in front of the tram stopping-place waiting for the first car. They were factory mechanics, foremen and overseers, the aristocracy of manual labour, whose comparative wealth isolated them from the rest.

Free from the morning rush, the chief of the octroi office watched the workmen from the door. Suddenly spying a young man coming from Madrid, he called him, inviting him to have a cigarette. There was plenty of time to take a rest ; he had the whole day to sleep if he chose. And as he offered the young man a light, he winked one eye and asked :

" How about politics, Maltrana, my friend ? When are are we going to get our innings ? Is it true that the government is going to fall ? "

Maltrana made a gesture of indifference as he lighted his cigarette. Small of stature and poorly dressed, his whole person betrayed the misery of a young life struggling without a goal, finding no road. His hat, with a filthy band, stuck on the back of his head, left exposed an enormous bulging forehead that seemed to crush with its weight his greenish-brown face. Oblique eyes and a sparse moustache of thin hairs gave his face an Asiatic mien, but the brightness of his pupils, revealing a wide-awake intelligence, softened the annoying queerness of his appearance. Under the frayed edges of his trousers, his boots showed their broken heels and cracked leather. A reddish-black Macfarland served him for a coat, and between the

lapels he displayed with a certain amount of pride his only luxury, the luxury of all poverty-stricken youths, a big tie of gaudy colours that hid his shirt, and a high and stiff collar that through use had acquired the yellow mellowness of old marble.

" How about politics ? " asked the official again.

And Maltrana dropped his air of indifference. The changes in the Cabinet and what was said in parliament hardly interested him. Down in the editorial rooms, where he was wont to spend the nights, they talked hours and hours about such things, but he never made an effort to remember one single word, engulfed as he was in the reading of papers and magazines. How could such trifles interest anyone ? . . . But through a desire to please his good friend, who treated him with a certain amount of respect because he wrote in the newspapers, he made an effort and answered without knowing very well what he was saying :

" Yes, I believe the government is going to fall. I heard something about it at the editorial rooms."

" And the big fellows ? What do the big fellows say about it ? "

Isidro Maltrana knew that the " big fellows " were the newspaper men who worked with him, the ones who concocted editorials and political articles and whom the official thus designated because he looked upon them as the depositories of national secrets, as the only prophets of the future.

" Well, the big fellows," answered the young man somewhat timidly, as if lying were repugnant to him, " think that everything is going first-rate, and that very soon we shall have our innings."

" That's what I say myself."

And after this emphatic affirmation that exuded faith, the official cast an envious glance at the young man of miserable appearance who was fortunate enough to rub elbows with the " big fellows " as their equal.

He used to see Maltrana every morning as the latter came from the editorial rooms. In order to go to bed, the poor young man had to wait until his stepfather and his

younger brother had left their wretched room in Artistas Street. Once there, he lay down on the only bed, still warm with the impression of the bodies of the bricklayer and his apprentice. Sleeping until well into the afternoon, he returned to Madrid at almost the same hour that the flock of workers wended their way back to Cuatro Caminos. His hard life was like that of a defenceless bird, with neither bill nor claws, fluttering in a forest of printed leaves, with no food other than the crumbs forgotten by someone else.

He used to take advantage of the light, paper and ink of the editorial room to translate, when the building was empty, certain books whose destination was unknown to him. He obtained this kind of work from some friends who, in their turn, had received it from the translators who signed the books. Passing through the hands of intermediaries before it reached him, the compensation for this work had shrunk so much that poor Maltrana, at the end of eight hours' laborious toiling, enviously thought of the seven *reales* his brother Pepin—better known by the nickname of Barrabas—earned as an apprentice mason. He was grateful for anything to translate, since this work was the most regular and dependable means of earning a living. The money from a translation represented his evening meal in a tavern frequented by people of the profession, small-salaried journalists, youths of flowing mane and loose ties who spoke ill of everybody, thus amusing themselves while impatiently waiting for the day when they would become famous. To be sure, these banquets did not amount to much, but how he thought about them the days when he had neither work nor the hope of getting new translations! He spent the night hours in the editorial rooms reading continuously, while hunger pinched his stomach. At times when he saw the characters dancing in front of his eyes and his head seemed to roll away, repelling all ideas, he felt a strong desire to struggle, a ferocious yearning to strike somebody. He then started some philosophical discussion, ending by making fun of the political ideals of the paper, just for the pleasure of squashing with his para-

doxes and his culture, which he wielded like a mallet, all those ignoramuses who, alas! had dined.

Sometimes, when Maltrana was suffering the pangs of hunger, certain fellow-politicians from the outskirts of Madrid came into the editorial rooms. They wanted to make a good impression on the reporters, and Maltrana looked upon them as harbingers of joy.

"Come on!" shouted the strangers, "bring coffee for the boys . . . anything they want."

And the boys devoured the generously buttered toast, drank to the dregs the black coffee and milk that filled the pots, and lighted the cheap cigars, the last, definitive trace of their friends' generosity. Maltrana, intoxicated with coffee and butter, suddenly saw everything through the bluish cloud of smoke under a most cheerful aspect, and began to speak with youthful vehemence about philosophy and literature, astonishing the strangers, who perceived in him a future great man, perhaps even a statesman, when they should get their innings! . . .

The evenings when this extraordinary succour was lacking, Maltrana, his head between his hands, pretended to be reading a foreign review, while with anxious eyes he followed every movement of Don Cristobal, the owner of the paper, a kind-hearted soul, outspoken and fatherly, whose only preoccupations were his paper, the revolution that never came, and his desire that everybody should acknowledge the sacrifices he was making for the *cause*.

"Homer . . . will you have a cigarette?"

Homer was Maltrana. His fellow-workers in the editorial rooms gave him a new nickname every month. They hated his culture, which bored them to death, for they insisted that, with all his knowledge, he was incapable of giving an account of a social function or of a sensational crime. At first, they had named him Schopenhauer, because he was constantly quoting his favourite philosopher, afterwards Nietzsche; but these names were difficult to pronounce, and one fine night when Maltrana, isolated from reality, dared to quote in Greek several verses from the *Iliad*, they decided to call him Homer for good.

Homer gratefully accepted the cigarettes given him by Don Cristobal, who admired him as a learned man, recognizing at the same time that he would have been no good even as an office boy. Smoking he whiled away the anguishing interval until the first hours of the morning, when the owner of the paper displayed his generosity. The kindly Don Cristobal, feeling somewhat faint in his stomach, invited all the boys to share his supper. Sometimes it was mutton with beans, cooked in the neighbouring tavern ; sometimes an enormous dish of cod and potatoes that appeared to Maltrana like a resplendent sun among the clouds of newspapers that filled the table under the cold light of the electric lamps.

" Come on, gentlemen, who will keep me company ? " asked Don Cristobal with fatherly gestures. " Bring bread and wine for everybody . . . Homerito, draw closer and dip in. At your age one always has an appetite, and you must be somewhat hungry."

Homerito dipped in, timorously at first ; but the first mouthfuls awakened in him the ravenous beast that slept in his stomach, and in order to tame it, he shovelled in food as fast as he could, fearing to be devoured by it if he slackened in his supplies. The kindly benefactor laughed heartily at the voracious hunger of the homely lad. Ah, Youth ! Ah, wonderful stomach ! On seeing him, you felt a new desire to eat. In fact, Homerito was his appetizer.

And Maltrana, when the dish had been cleaned up and the last crumbs had disappeared, drank a couple of glasses of wine which succeeded, thanks to a happy digestion, in making the last hours of his editorial work the best of the night.

Only then did Homer speak of politics, sharing with the others their illusions and hopes. The hoped-for revolution would come . . . they would get their innings, and then, if there was either justice or shame, Don Cristobal would be appointed minister in the first government to be formed. But, smiling modestly, Don Cristobal rejected the honour. In order to encourage him, Maltrana included himself in the

victorious clique. He would be something also, why not? . . . He would feel satisfied with a dictatorship over public instruction in order to educate the country by kicks and blows. Each one has his own hobby.

And the good Homer, amidst the laughter of his companions, described his entrance into the National Library, the day after the revolution, followed by a picket of citizens. Employees, line up! The librarians, who knew him because he had argued with them on more than one occasion, awaited his sentence trembling with fear. Now they were going to pay for the lies they told whenever they were asked for a book, saying that they did not have it or that some other reader was using it, and for their wish to make people read nothing but stale works of useless erudition, vexatious tomes that repelled the public and robbed it of the desire to educate itself. The string of prisoners was taken down the stairs under the blows of the butt-ends of the guns, and the dictator had them ruthlessly hung from the trees of Recoletos, with a placard pinned on their breasts: "Traitors to culture and disseminators of barbarism among the people." Without leaving the building, he took a turn through the Hall of Modern Art, sacking that hospital of monstrosities, horrid warehouse of ugliness and historical drivellings. With rare exceptions, all the pictures were thrown out of the windows and a great bonfire made with them. By the dictator's orders, the art students jumped over the bonfire as a sign of rejoicing at the disappearance of so many scarecrows.

Then, with his escort of ruthless executioners, he proceeded to the Prado Museum. All the employees were called and lined up, and he delivered a speech that made their hair stand on end. The time had come to put a stop to the eternal dance, to the interminable classification, to the new arrangement of the works of art whereby the public were kept constantly guessing and wandering from one room to another, as if they were going through a labyrinth. The first to move a picture or a statue would get a bullet in his head: that's all. And Homer ended his revolutionary excursion by closing the Royal Theatre for ever. Hurrah

for music! Down with opera! Let the aristocrats converse freely in their salons without the annoying tum-tum of an orchestra; let them exhibit their jewels without taking Art as an excuse for such a display of luxury. The former porters who now made millions because their larynxes suffered from the disease of tenorism, the young ladies of flowing white robes and dishevelled hair, who now pretended to be mad between trills and pauses, should at once return to their former occupations, carrying baggage or working at a sewing machine. If they called themselves artists thenceforth, they would be punished according to the Civil Code for misrepresenting their civil status. All starving musicians, all earnest but modest singers, were to be supported by the state, and they would give a concert gratis, to which attendance would be compulsory—in each of the ten districts of the capital.

And after these insignificant reforms, Homer sat down in the dictatorial chair and started the great reform: a general examination of all school teachers; an inspection of the mentality of all university professors, carried out in an implacable fashion, ruthlessly, judging them as an inquisitor might have judged. University professors were degraded to village teachers; the great majority of country school teachers were dismissed and given a plot of uncultivated land to plough, which would afford them a natural outlet for the expansion of their real aptitudes. Many unfortunates of undeniable talent who hesitated before the avenues of life, without knowing which road to take, entered the teaching profession, dignified and elevated now to the most important one in the nation. The humblest teacher in Spain would have a larger salary than a church canon. . . .

Thus spoke Homer amidst the roars of his companions, modestly leaving to the great men of the *cause* the solution of other problems: those of the stomach and the conscience. He would attend to his own business—the polishing up of the national intelligence—and as soon as he had properly set up the machinery for the breaking-in process, he would immediately exile from Spain to Africa anyone who had

reached his twentieth birthday without having taken advantage of the facilities offered to educate himself.

As the terrible dictator went out into the street a little after dawn, he suddenly came into contact with reality. The cold air, piercing his frail Macfarlane, made the terrible butcher of librarians and implacable destroyer of museums tremble like a leaf. The tyrant felt his appetite re-sharpened by the coldness of dawn and he accepted from the editor, or any of his companions who happened to be in funds, a cup of chocolate and half a dozen dough-nuts. They went to the *chocolateréa* in Jacometrezo Street and sat down next to the wall of polished blue bricks, opposite the glass doors that were purposely left open so that the loafers who waited for the morning, sitting around the first tables, should die of pneumonia.

There, dipping the dough-nuts in the muddy liquid, he felt his hopes rising again, though not so intensely as in the warm atmosphere of the editorial rooms. He would be somebody; he would climb very high. Whenever his stomach was full, he became animated by a blind faith in his own destiny. And with these hopes, he started on his way to Cuatro Caminos and to the miserable bed which, still warm, awaited him.

But until the moment to climb came, his life could not be sadder. Instead of devising some means of earning his bread and butter, as his stepfather advised him, he read and read through the sheer pleasure of acquiring knowledge, as if he had been some great lord who had his needs and caprices assured. He curtailed his food in order to be able to pay, though somewhat late, his dues at the Atheneum. Without reviews, without knowing what was being thought in Europe, life would be perfectly intolerable to him.

He wasted whole nights reading at the editorial rooms and very seldom picked up the pen. At first he had been entrusted with reporting everyday happenings, and with padding telegrams. The editor took a great interest in him; he wanted to make him one of his regular employees and give him a salary that would have equalled that of an

octroi officer. But one night, as he was trying to write a report of a fire, he tore up any number of sheets, nervously walked up and down the office, and finally had to hand over the job to an office boy, who could not write one single line without misspelling. They gave him some telegrams to pad, and he succeeded in re-writing them with fewer words than the originals. His was a superior mind, incapable of such low tasks. One day—the editor being absent—they gave him an editorial to write ; he filled up three columns with reasoning cold prose, and after examining and weighing carefully the political situation, the ideals defended by the newspaper appeared every bit as bad as those of the government in power.

Homer, according to the editor, was the poison-tree of knowledge. He killed everything under its shadow. They gave him a free hand to write whatever came into his head, and he published three articles on Ruskin and artistic beauty, Nietzsche and imperialism, and the harmonies and discordances between socialism and the doctrines of Darwin and Haeckel. Months afterwards they still laughed in the editorial rooms about those columns of thick dull prose that no one had ever read to the end. Don Cristobal asserted with grave sarcasm that the paper had been on the point of being wrecked, and that the readers had threatened to strike if another article by Homer appeared in its columns. The idea of giving the public such enigmas, when all it wanted was that the Prime Minister should be called an ass and that the deputies should insult the gentlemen on the ministerial benches ! . . .

Maltrana, declared a failure, with no hope of gaining the fifteen monthly *duros* that had been promised him before his failure, continued to attend the editorial rooms, regularly. Where else could he go ? . . . There he found someone to listen to him, even if in an ironic attitude ; sometimes they even praised his culture, going so far as to admit that he was somewhat of a genius, although a little crazy. Besides, he was aware of his one great defect ; it was the evil that afflicted his generation, in which unmethodical study and an excess of argumentation had broken the

mainspring of life—lack of will-power. He was utterly impotent for action. He studied voraciously, but was incapable of deriving any profit from it. He spent his nights talking; paradox after paradox sprang up in his talk like multicoloured rockets, but he felt unable to put down in black and white even the smallest part of the ideas that flowed like a fountain jet in his conversation.

And he stood still, knowing that he was wasting time, that he had steered a wrong course in life, with no will-power to make an effort, trusting that some strange fatalism would pull him out of his fix, feeling sure that some extraordinary event without the least effort on his part would take him out of the rut into which he had sunk.

That morning was one of the happiest for Maltrana. He had money; the previous night he had collected thirteen *duros* for a translation, and he was delighted to feel the weight of the silver near his stomach, which still retained some of the heat and comfort of the recent treats. He had dined at the tavern, asylum of happy days, and had partaken of the most succulent dishes, having had, besides, the pleasure of paying for the morning chocolate for his companions, who were astonished at so much wealth.

His good friend at the octroi, who offered him every morning a cigarette and a share of his coffee, also benefited by his generosity. Maltrana wanted to treat him, to make him share his opulence, and he took him to the little tavern behind the octroi office almost by force. The official could have a cup of tea, or a liqueur or anything he wished; it was about time that he accepted something from Maltrana.

The two stood at the door of the little tavern waiting to be served, for they did not want to enter into the thick, nauseating atmosphere of the establishment.

Behind the octroi office, at the drinking troughs, a flock of pigeons fed on the ground. They came from Artistas Street, flying there in search of the remains of the fodder given to the oxen. Next to the little tavern arose the white walls of the Dogs' Sanitorium—the asylum for the canines belonging to the rich, where they were carefully looked after by a veterinary surgeon.

Maltrana spied a man on the main road, coming towards the little tavern.

" That's Coleta," said the chief of the octroi, " Domingo, the most famous rag-picker in the Carolinas."

The man carried an empty bag on his back, but he walked bent down as if he already felt the future load. The points of his shoes, too big for his feet, turned up ; his velveteen trousers were tied round his waist with a hempen-cord *esparto* rope ; his shirt, open in front, disclosed a tangle of whitish hair and the parched skin of the neck with its taut ligaments. A cut-away coat with long tails and a smashed-in shapeless hat which pointed upward like a warlike helmet completed his dirty miserable attire.

He was old, with a sort of sacerdotal malice in his shaven face, and greenish eyes that were sheltered by bushy gray eyebrows. Those parts of his cheeks which were swept by the razor were the only clean spots on his face. The rest was black with filth, each wrinkle a muddy furrow ; through the scales of the hardened dandruff that covered his scalp appeared the white prickles left from the hair-cut.

Coleta saluted the official and fixed his eyes on Maltrana.

" Are you not Isidro, the grandson of Mariposa . . . one who is a gentleman in Madrid and writes in the newspapers ? . . ."

Yes ; he was the man, and he was very glad that Coleta should recognize him. Did he want to take something ?

But before the rag-picker could answer, Maltrana and his friend noticed a big gash that reddened one side of his face. The clotted blood stained the edges of the wound.

Coleta unconcernedly shrugged his shoulders. That was nothing ; he had stumbled as he was leaving Cubanito's tavern on the previous night.

" We were up till one in the morning, me and the boys of the neighbourhood. We had a hell of a time ! Blind drunk ! "

Before ordering anything from the landlady, who was laughing just at sight of him, he wanted to know what

Maltrana had been drinking, and he twisted his mouth with disgust when he heard that it was a glass of *aguardiente* with lemon in it.

"*Aguardiente!* . . . That's for boozers. Wine for mine; pure red wine for mine, for it makes life longer, and the more of it the better."

It was worth seeing the indignation with which he spoke of drunkards, praising at the same time the virtues of the red liquid. There he was, with his sixty-eight years and more. Every morning he went to Madrid for the picking. When he returned to his hovel at Cuatro Caminos, he spent hours and hours sorting his load and that of the woman next door, and afterwards he organized a merry party at the tavern. In the small hours, when he was well primed, he used to take off his clothes, without fear of the cold, and stand stark naked to make the scandalized wenches scream and his companions laugh. He had never been ill.

"I never sleep. And eat . . . less than a bird. I live on a small piece of bread, just like this. Please excuse my way of describing it. Eating is no good; it leaves less room for drink. Besides, it makes you sick and twists your guts, and you spew, and then you disgust everybody with your indecent manners. . . . Wine keeps me alive. . . . Long live red wine! . . . and the white also. This is the best medicine there is."

And he drank at one gulp the glass offered him by the landlady.

In the middle of the road a group of ragamuffins who had followed him stood at a distance, staring at him and shouting insulting remarks.

"Coleta! . . . Hi! . . . You with the overcoat! You old souse!"

The rag-picker listened to their shouts quietly, like a hero well satisfied with a popular demonstration. As long as they confined themselves to shouting! . . . Something worse happened when their shouts were accompanied by stones and he had to leave his bag to pursue the attacking party.

"Go on and kid your mothers."

And after this prudent piece of advice, that incited the ragamuffins to redouble their insults, Coleta drank another glass, praising his good luck in having met such generous friends that morning.

He was the poorest among the rag-pickers: no cart, no donkey, no house. He had drunk them all up. His wife was in the cemetery; and as he spoke about her, his eyes were wet with tears at the remembrance, no doubt, of the many thrashings he had given her. Now he had with him Borracha, the dirtiest, laziest female rag-picker from Bellasvistas to Fuencarral. A dragon with skirts, gentlemen; he was not ashamed to confess his cowardice. If he gave her a slap, she returned three. It was useless for him to buy, on his return from business, an ash stick at the shops of the Estrecho or to cut a thorny branch from some hedge; that only amounted to supplying arms to the enemy, for Borracha ended by taking it from him and chasing him away from the tavern with it.

It was envy, pure jealousy on her part, because he could always find friends to invite him, whereas, although she was very fond of wine, she had to satisfy herself with the *cortinas*, that is to say, the remains left in the bottom of the glasses.

They lived in a sort of hen-coop in a vacant plot full of rubbish-heaps. They helped their landlady in the rag-picking, and on their way back from Madrid she carried their bag in her cart. He had good customers. Ever since his youth he had worked one of the best streets, full of gentry who ate very well. With the remains of their meals, he could have grown as fat as a monk, only he was not fond of eating. The children from his first marriage lived in Madrid, sometimes working—paving streets—sometimes starving with hunger. He hardly ever saw them.

"The family . . . devil take it, gentlemen. You are worth what you have, and no more; each one fends for himself. When the kids see me, they ask me to hand them over my trade. My landlady wants it too. . . . To hell with them! My business will always be in my name. I am a wide-awake chap, and I have seen a lot. My

business will be mine as long as I live, yours truly, Domingo Rivero, alias Coleta."

And as he spoke thus, he looked with pride upon the bag slung over his shoulder, the much envied business that he was ready to defend to his dying day, as if that piece of canvas were to be his shroud.

He then began to praise the landlady and her wine. Hurrah for the handsome lady! The glass was somewhat dearer there than at the tavern in the rag-pickers' district, but the wine was much better. On his way to Madrid, and returning home, he could not resist the temptation of going out of his way just to admire the landlady's eyes, her lady-like ways, and the customers of the tavern—all perfect gentlemen. . . . And these flattering remarks earned him a third glass of wine.

Maltrana and his friend, fearing that Coleta might give up the idea of going to Madrid if they invited him to another glass, returned to the octroi office. Coleta followed them, insisting that he was not in any hurry. His customers were in the habit of rising rather late.

The stalls for the little market of Cuatro Caminos had already been set up along the pavements of Punta Brava. The butchers were hanging out carcases from some black beams. An acrid smell of pickles and withered vegetables permeated the air.

The group of children who followed the rag-picker disbanded, hiding behind the nearest trams when they saw him in such good company.

Suddenly the grey morning was lit up by flashes of gold. The white vapours were torn asunder; a hole of deepest blue opened in the clouds and through it shone the rays of the hidden sun. The earth seemed to smile under its damp mask. The pools shone with quivering reflections, as if they had become peopled with fishes of fire; groups of white and red buildings emerged like vigorous brush-strokes on the dark-green hills that closed the horizon. The spire of Santa Cruz rose like a flame above the roofs of Madrid. The flock of pigeons, billing and cooing, took wing in a spiral, with joyous whirr of feathers.

Two young girls passed by the octroi, arm in arm, the edge of their shawls over their mouths. They had the beauty of the working girl—the freshness of that brief youth of the female worker that triumphs, only momentarily, over her hereditary anæmia, over the privations that hamper her physical development.

Maltrana fixed his eyes on the smaller girl, a pale-faced brunette with big eyes of an intense black, almost blue, colour like that of her hair. Her frail bust showed itself erect under her shawl with a natural arrogance ; her miserable summer skirt swung above the mud with a certain majestic rhythm about her little feet. She was neatly shod, her feet seemingly the most carefully looked-after part of her person.

"Hurrah for the pretty girls!" shouted the drunkard, putting his arms akimbo. "There goes the cream of the district! . . ."

And the better to express his enthusiasm, he threw his grotesque hat into a pool, splashing everybody with mud.

The octroi officer saluted the girls with fatherly facetiousness.

"Be good. . . . Watch out and don't get lost. . . ."

The two girls passed by smiling, without answering the salutations, except by a slight motion of their heads. A few paces away, the smaller one spoke.

"Good-bye, Isidro," she said in a grave voice, blushing.

"Good-bye, Feliciana," answered the youth.

And his eyes followed her, admiring her rhythmic graceful gait over the mud and her tall elegant figure as it became smaller and smaller in the distance.

The sun suddenly hid itself ; the clouds closed in again ; the pools shone no longer. A grey veil covered the earth again ; the spiral of doves ceased fluttering and suddenly settled down in the mud.

The octroi officer spoke about the two girls. He saw them every morning at the same hour ; they worked in a cap factory in Bravo Murillo Street. Feliciana was the only daughter of Mosco, the famous hunter of Tetuan, and

her chum was from Bellavista. Feliciana called for her every morning so that they could go to the factory together.

The mention of Mosco made the rag-picker burst into exclamations of admiration. There was a man for you. He kept everybody on the *qui vive* in the royal park. Coleta had it on good authority: the steward at El Pardo was desperate because he had not been able to catch Mosco, and the keepers as soon as it grew dark, began to wonder in what part of the immense park the blackguard could be working.

The royal rabbits slept in their burrows, resigned to the probable fate of being wakened by the jaws of a bloodthirsty ferret; the deer, as they drank in the brooks under the light of the stars, whispered into each other's ear: "Look out, brother; Mosco must be somewhere near. . . ." One of his dogs, called Puesto en Ama, had been so famous for its fierceness that when the guards killed it in an encounter, they carried it in triumph to the administration building at El Pardo, had it stuffed with straw and had glass eyes put in and kept it as a curiosity of the royal preserve.

Coleta had known that dog. It hunted the deer in full flight in the middle of the night; not a stag could resist it. On one occasion it caused its master to earn almost three thousand *reales*. Now, Mosco had another dog, the second Puesto en Ama, a real jewel, but not so valuable as the other, and with it he continued his poaching excursions, his clandestine dare-devil exploits, always managing to get away from the gunshots of the rangers or the blows of the mounted guards, though sometimes he escaped dripping with his own blood. The lead that man had in his body! . . .

Coleta, having exhausted his praises for the daring hunter—whose feats were better known to his listeners than to himself—was about to start on his way to Madrid, when his instinct—that of a parasite—led him to discover an uncovered cart advancing, swaying with slow movements to and fro, along the ruts of the main road. The tall powerful mule, covered with scabs through lack of care, had a head-stall decorated with multicoloured ribbons

picked up among the city rubbish. It looked like the sacrificial beast of some tribe, decked up for a savage feast.

"He'll give me a lift," said Coleta. "Hi! Señor Polo . . . Señor Polo, stop a minute! Here's a friend of yours."

From the back of the cart, like a jack-in-the-box, the head of an old man issued, his coat collar up to the ears and a fur cap reaching down to his shoulders. His was a puffed-up, reddish face, and his eyes had a vagueness akin to stupidity. The cart stopped and another old man appeared very slowly at the front, painfully standing up with the reins in his hands. He looked like the Eternal Father. His wide silvery beard extended over his chest and made a fleecy white crown about his rosy cheeks. His upper lip, carefully shaven, was the cleanest part of his face. His small, deep-set, greenish eyes were surrounded by wrinkles that looked like charcoal lines, so filled with dirt were the furrows. His dress was as bizarre as his old face. He was covered with a sort of sleeveless coat made of rabbit-skins, tied round his waist with a rope. Protected at the thighs by pieces cut from an old carpet, his trousers were adorned with ribbons like the ones worn by the mule. A greenish cap, with sundry pieces of cobwebs upon it, covered his white and rosy head. His garments revealed both uncivilized filth and infantile simplicity. His hands were black, with scales on their backs; his cheeks and lips, caressed by the razor, were as fresh as those of a child.

"What do you wish, gentlemen?" he asked in a high-pitched voice and courteous tone. "What can I do for you, gentlemen? . . ."

His eyes landed on Coleta, and he made a grimace of disgust.

"Ah! It's you, you boozer!"

He then saluted the octroi chief with a shake of his head, for he was always very respectful to those officials who might give him trouble, and as he fixed his eyes on Maltrana, he let out an exclamation of joy.

"Can that be you, Isidro?" he asked in his childlike voice. "I was dying to see you. . . . Granny is always thinking about you; she always gives me the same message:

'If you see the boy, tell him to come and see us. We have hardly set eyes on him since we got married.' "

" Yes, it is I, friend Zarathustra. How is Granny getting along with you? Are you still enjoying your honeymoon? "

The old man protested with a gesture, but continued to smile.

" Stop your nonsense; give me a name for once and all, and don't keep changing it all the time. Sometimes you call me Kruger, and I don't feel offended at being compared with that gentleman, for he fought against the English. . . . God damn them! The other day I found in the rubbish heaps a match-box with his picture on it, and, really, we look like each other a little bit. . . . Other times I am Trapatustra . . . or Zorra-yo-sé-que; another personage whom I resemble, according to you. . . . Yes, I know who he was; you told me his history one day. A learned man who didn't own a cent, like myself; who knew everything and laughed at everything . . . just as I do; he lived high up, just as I live, for I have Madrid at my feet. He had an eaglet beside him when he told his stories, and for lack of a bird, I have five dogs who understand better than many humans, and surround me and listen to me when I speak. . . . For you, Isidrillo, although you make fun of me, you recognize that I am somewhat of a wise man."

" Who can doubt it? " exclaimed Maltrana facetiously. " That's why I call you Zarathustra. You are the solitary of Bellavista, the great philosopher of Cuatro Caminos, the wise man of the picking, the most profound of all the rag-pickers that enter Madrid."

" Ninety-four years, yes, sir," continued Zarathustra addressing the chief of the octroi. " A healthy body, a stomach like a vulture's; the only things weak about me are my legs. They force me to keep quiet in the cart while this fellow, my assistant "—and he pointed to the idiot at the end of the cart—" goes into the houses. I am the oldest person in the trade. There are a few of my time in the Rastro who have settled down, prospered and have an establishment in the Americas. More than fifty years of duty, and during all that period I have never failed to go

down to Madrid one single day. . . . I have seen lots; I have seen Señor Bravo Murillo bringing the water to Madrid, and I have seen the water from the Lozoya jumping for the first time in the old fountain basin at the Puerta del Sol. I have seen the city growing and expanding and giving us poor wretches a kick so that we would move further away. I have seen that very octroi office at what is now the crossroads of Bilbao. Where I had my first shanty, there is now a great café. All that was wild land, shelter for evil men; they used to steal a cloak from God Himself as soon as it grew dark, and now you can walk about there and you find nothing but streets and more streets and electric lights and pavings of cobble-stones and asphalt, and all of it in the very place where my eyes saw rabbits running about. . . . The old cemeteries have remained within the city, and us poor wretches who lived near them are beating a retreat, and we will end by pitching our camp beyond Fuencarral. They say that this is progress, and I have a great deal of respect for that gentleman. Progress is all right. . . . But let it be the same for everybody. Because, my dear sir, I see that people only remember the poor to push them away, as if they were afflicted with a pest. Hunger and poverty do not progress, nor are they exchanged for something better. The city has entirely changed; the upper classes spend more lavishly than ever, but the middle and lower classes remain the same. There is the same hunger now as in my good days."

"Very good, Zarathustra, very good," said Maltrana, as the old man paused in his speech.

"As for myself," continued the old man, addressing himself to the octroi officer, "the one thing I feel most sorry for is that I won't be able to see where all this is going to end. This fad about Progress has been born in my time. When I was a boy, the waters ran in a different direction. As a young man, I was a Carlist; I come from La Mancha and I was in Palillos' gang; all through ignorance. But, I repeat I saw baby Progress born, and I would like to see with my own eyes how far it goes, for up till now, they have done very little in favour of the youngster. . . . But

I am so old! . . . Do you see Coleta, that boozer who is listening to us? He seems to be years older than I, but I saw him born. . . . Ninety-four years, sir, and I have enough rope for one hundred odd. I am sure of it; I know what I am talking about."

Maltrana and his friend approved with a shake of their heads what the old man was saying. His tongue, once loosened, could not stop; he spoke with childish incoherence.

"To-day, I am a little late in going to the picking, but it doesn't matter. My customers are first-rate, and perfectly sure: cafés at the Puerta del Sol, old business houses in Carmen Street. I've had some of the houses for forty years. I have known their owners ever since they were boys. When they cried, their parents used to frighten them by threatening to send for Polo, who would take them away in his cart. In those days I had a much better temper, and better clothes too. Do you see this fur garment, superior to anything the king wears? Well, I made it myself; and I made another one too that I keep in the house, for holidays, with coloured ribbons and spangles that would blind you if you looked at it. It is a robe worthy of an Indian potentate, according to Isidrillo. In the old days, I used to dress myself as a pilgrim to go to the picking, but the children followed me like a bunch of fools and the cops threatened to lock me up. . . . And why, my dear sirs? . . . It's what I used to tell them. What are we all in this world, but pilgrims who go along begging from each other until we reach the end of our lives? The king is a pilgrim, for in order to live with pomp and luxury, he begs millions from those under him; the rich are pilgrims, for they live on what they take away from the poor; we, the middle class, are pilgrims . . . and I don't say the lower class, for it doesn't sound good. There isn't a creature of God that is lower. Lower are the animals. We are the middle ones."

And he spoke gazing far off, with a vague look that Maltrana knew was a sure sign of a flood of digressions.

"Zarathustra, you are soaring!" exclaimed the young man. "Don't crush us with your philosophic incoherences."

" A fine shape I am in for soaring ! I haven't been able to sleep a wink the whole night long . . . these confounded legs of mine . . . this rheumatism that hangs on to them like a mad dog. What weather ! And the worst of it is that it will last all this moon. You know, Isidrillo, that I know what I am talking about. No books, compasses or maps for me. That's all right for wise men. I have spent my life in the country, watching the sky night and day. It has no secrets for me. Believe me, sir," he continued, addressing the official, " the sun is a noble body, and from it comes all that is good. But, before reaching us, it passes through four other bodies, the blue, the red, the yellow and the green ones. That's why we see the rainbow. The weather depends on the colour that is more prominent. Besides, there are eight winds, but they are understood only by Him who works them, and that is God. Isn't that perfectly true and clear ? Well, the wise men won't listen to me. I have gone to the Observatory time and again to give them good advice, and they never let me cross the door, saying that they have already somebody to take away the rubbish for them. Everything is like that in this country. Nobody pays any attention to heavenly matters ; and our bread is in the heavens. Without rain there is no agriculture, and agriculture is the noblest profession in the country. It should be protected ; we must help the middle ones ; let the upper ones pay, for they have plenty ; but don't let everything be for them alone. . . ."

Maltrana interrupted the old man. He was capable of standing there the whole morning if they would continue to listen to him. His customers would be waiting for him ; his assistant, Bobo, was casting impatient glances at him ; poor Coleta was waiting to be allowed to ride in the cart to Madrid.

" Get on, you scoundrel," said Polo in a shrill, pitying voice.

The drunkard climbed into the cart dragging his empty bag, and Zarathustra pulled at the reins, guiding the mule obliquely to get into the middle of the road.

"Good-bye," said the rag-picker. "Don't forget, Isidrillo, that Granny is waiting for you. Come over some time. She would be so glad to see you, poor soul. . . . And you, mister, remember what an old man says who knows a little. You must help the middle one. The middle one is the one who makes the bread."

He was speaking with his head turned towards the octroi office, pulling at the reins without seeing where the mule was going. The cart bumped against a tram-car that had stopped at the crossing of Cuatro Caminos. The tip of one shaft knocked a splinter off the car and scratched the paint. The crew let out a volley of oaths, got off the car, and began to insult Zarathustra.

Some passers-by ran towards the tram, the employees of the octroi also came over and a circle of curious people surrounded the vehicle and the men who were gesticulating and insulting the rag-picker.

"There is no occasion to get mad, gentlemen," said the old man, in a sad shrill voice. "I know what this means; take my name and address."

One of them took down Polo's address, without ceasing to insult him for his carelessness, swearing that he would have to pay dearly. Seldom did a week pass without his bumping some tram-car. At his age, he should stay at home, without trying to drive mules.

The car went on, the idlers continued on their several ways, and Zarathustra started his mule again, while Bobo and the drunkard lay quiet in the cart, dumbfounded by the accident.

"You, Isidrillo," said the old man, "seeing that you write for the papers and that you know the big men, try and fix this up for me."

But the old man, before Maltrana could answer him, smiled sorrowfully and went on talking with an expression of discouragement.

"Never mind; it's useless. Good-bye, gentlemen. On to Madrid, mule. . . . I'll pay, as usual. . . . Who can fight with those people, who are the masters? Pay for your crime, seeing that you scraped a little paint on your

way to earn your bread. They have millions and they can make mincemeat of a poor devil every week with their trams ; they can cover the Puerta del Sol with a mess of devilish wires that will kill half of Madrid the day they happen to fall down. . . . This is the planet of the weak. The wolf eats the lamb, the kite eats the dove, the big fish swallows the small, and we must thank the rich, because although they could swallow the middle ones, they let them live, so that they may suffer."

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Isidro Maltrana remembered his past, he lingered on the days of his infancy, spent in the Infant Orphanage. Something spoke to him of his former existence ; but they were vague souvenirs, pale memories interspersed with gaps of oblivion, the whole wrapped up in a pale fog that mingled persons and events.

The earliest remembrance was that of the court of a tenement house which to him, a mere child, appeared immense, with a sad, tired light that came from above and became dulled as it slid along the greasy walls and filtered through the ragged clothes that hung in the corridors.

He saw himself crawling on all fours through an endless corridor in front of a row of doors numbered with a uniformity he had afterwards seen in barracks and gaols. Many women, sitting before the doors, sewed and talked. At times they quarrelled, and as their voices rose, the balconies became full of busts pushed forward by an evil curiosity, and of dishevelled heads that urged the antagonists as if they had been mad beasts.

At night-fall the men arrived. They came home sad, tired, frowning, laconic, with no desire other than to ask for their supper, muttering curses against their employer, their fellow workers, the rich, the hard, thankless life that had nothing for them but kicks and blows. Some days they arrived later, and while the women counted little heaps of money, dividing them up into smaller piles, according to some previous calculations, the men sang, laughed, called each other from door to door and from floor to floor, as joyful as birds, forgetting their misery, seized by the happiness of the moment, which they thought

endless, speaking of going back to the tavern where they had stopped for a considerable time before they brought home their wages.

At noon, Maltrana's mother took the youngster in one arm, and passing the other through the handle of the lunch basket, went to seek her husband, the bricklayer. They used to eat on the pavements of the narrow steep streets, close to the curb of sharp cobblestones. Sometimes they ate in the Castellana, in the shade of a tree, watching the luxurious carriages go by, shining brilliantly as the rays of the sun struck them ; and they admired the red and blue parasols, graceful silk cupolas under which walked elegant ladies preceded by gloved children whose fine dresses astonished the bricklayer's child. They sat down before the deep dish into which the mother emptied a substantial dinner, if they were in funds, or a miserable potato stew, if it happened to be the end of the week. Gusts of wind covered their food with dust and dried leaves. If it began to rain after the pot had been emptied into the dish, the family took shelter in some doorway and finished their meal there.

The youngster could tell when it was Sunday by their lunch, which was also eaten in the open air, but without scaffoldings near at hand, or working clothes around them. They took their Sunday lunch in the suburbs of the city, sitting on the sparse grass of a vacant allotment strewn with tin cans, pieces of bottles and old shoes, watching in the landscape of the neighbouring hills the bucolic silhouette of a sorrowful goat or a consumptive cow, listening to the mad waltz hammered at full speed by the barrel-organ of the tavern where the father used to have his square flask filled with wine. How well did Maltrana remember the holiday omelettes of pickled fish, eaten in the middle of the empty allotment invaded by the refuse of the city ! And the stews with bits of pork they had close to the fence of some building in process of construction, how clearly they came to his mind ! . . . His mother scarcely ate ; she did hardly anything but look after him, feeding him with one hand while with the other she held him in her lap.

With the maternal instinct of a bird, she had to touch everything with her mouth before she gave it to the youngster to swallow. She raised the spoon to her mouth, blew upon it, caressed it with her breath ; only after this process of purification did she dare offer it to her baby who, throwing back its big head of silky hair, displayed its toothless gums and its pink palate, almost white from anæmia. Meanwhile, the father ate in greedy silence, devouring the best part of the dish ; only when he had drunk the last drops did he pay any attention to the baby and take it on his knees. He gave it small pieces of cheese at the end of his knife, and laughed at the funny way in which it chewed, as if it had been an old man.

When Maltrana recalled his past, he asked himself many times how his parents had lived. As they returned from their Sunday picnics, he had seen them laughing with unwonted happiness ; the father endeavoured to seize the mother by the waist as soon as the twilight shadows enveloped them ; the mother defended herself, shocked because they were in the middle of the road. At other times—and even after so many years the remembrance still affected the young man—his father emerged with his mind wrathful, his voice coarse, his face congested, stinking with wine and throwing himself with clenched fists on the unfortunate woman, who ran, crazy with fear, around the miserable room, trying to avoid his blows. These horrible scenes ended only when the bricklayer threw himself on the bed, exhausted with beating his wife. In a few moments, his brutal snores resounded in the room, while the mother, her arms around the little boy, wept silently.

From this embryonic period of his memory, the one thing Isidro recalled best was a little homely, dirty, dog called Capitán, who shared the family's poverty. He accompanied them in their picnics and in their meals on the pavements. He walked around the bricklayer, waiting for some breadcrumbs and a few potatoes, and as soon as his hunger was satisfied, he lay down beside the baby, caressing it with his mischievous paws and rubbing its face with his

damp muzzle. Almost every night Isidro fell asleep with his arms around Capitán.

One day the little boy saw his mother, dishevelled and screeching, leave the house, followed by other women equally upset. Then, one of the neighbours took him up in her arms without answering the questions he asked her in his baby tongue. "Poor sonny! Poor boy!" was all the woman could say. He remembered it well. And he suddenly found himself in a big white room with blue tiles that seemed immense to him; he saw a lot of beds, a lot! with still heads sunk in the pillows, and in one there was a face covered with clothes, almost hidden by the turns of a bandage, and a black moustache, with blood-clots, and a pair of eyes, glassy with the spasms of pain, that looked at him perhaps without recognizing him. And that is all he noticed. Someone took him up again. This time it was his mother, who was crying as her neighbour had: "My son! Poor boy!"

The painful vision disappeared instantaneously from his memory. A period of darkness followed, after which he found himself with a black dress that gave him a certain prestige among the children of the neighbourhood. They treated him better than before, as if his misfortune had placed him above them all. His father had died after a horrible agony, mangled and torn to pieces by a fall from a roof. His mother spent the days away from home. She visited her relations in search of help. The family lived in the most distant corners of Madrid. Some lived in Tetuan and were rag-pickers; others, somewhat better off, had moved to the Rastro, and for years had had a store in the Americas. But their help diminished as the remembrance of the misfortune faded from their memories, and the mother had to look for work in strange houses. She had to hire herself out as a servant and came home only at night, bringing in a basket the remains of her dinner to feed her boy.

It was then that Maltrana entered the Orphanage. A lady in whose house his mother worked as a servant, took pity on the bricklayer's orphan. She was a veritable maniac

for cleanliness, and every two days, at the head of her maids, reinforced by Maltrana's mother, turned everything topsy-turvy. She took a great liking to Isidro's mother because of the strenuous way in which she beat the carpets, rubbed the woodwork and scattered an imaginary dust that seemed to have fled forever, frightened by her furious onslaught. She managed to have the youngster admitted into the Orphanage, thinking that thus his mother would be freer in her household duties. The boy, though homely, pleased the old lady very much with his precocious talk. She had no children. Later on, she would see what she could do for him.

And Maltrana began his life in the Orphanage; a life of submission and discipline, sweetened by study and the joys his superiority over his fellows afforded him. The teachers displayed great predilection for him. The director—in spite of the greatness that caused him to be considered in the institution as a semi-divine being—knew him well, even calling him by his proper name. The sisters liked him because he was "well behaved and discreet," and they gave him sweets. When some personage visited the establishment, Maltrana stood out from the ranks to be introduced as the best product of the institution.

Several years passed in this fashion, and so well did Maltrana adapt himself to his new mode of life that he never remembered he had a family outside the Orphanage, except on those days when the children were taken out for a walk.

On Thursdays and Sundays, late in the afternoon, there gathered at the Tribunal de Cuentas, opposite the Churriguera entrance to the institution, a group of miserable women, with their babies, old men and a host of children who killed time, as they waited for the Orphanage inmates, playing at bull-fighting with the tram cars, standing in the middle of the road until they had just time enough to get out of the way and save themselves from being crushed down by the wheels.

They were relatives of the Orphanage children. The mothers came from the remotest quarters of Madrid;

washer women, rag-pickers, workmen's widows, beggars, all the miserable and abandoned female rabble who procreate in order to cheat hunger. They addressed each other in friendly terms, for they met there week after week, and even those women who lived in the most distant districts of the city were united in close solidarity.

They awaited the return of the inmates who, early in the afternoon, had gone out to take a walk in the suburbs.

"There they come!" shouted a woman, pointing to the top of Fuencarral Street.

The groups ran up the street, knocking down passers-by, sweeping the pavements with a mighty force anxious to surround as soon as possible the rows of grey-clad children who advanced slowly, tired by their excursion.

Many women stopped, hesitated. Their children were not in that squad.

"There they come, down there!" shouted another woman.

And the whole avalanche swept back, pushing the passers-by again, eager to meet those who were arriving at the other end of the street. A vehement desire to meet them as far as possible from the Orphanage possessed the women, to gain a few seconds, to prolong the rapid interview about which they had been thinking for days and days.

At sight of the little ones, the passionate and noisy maternal instinct of the low females exploded in terrific expressions of love. Their kisses seemed bites; the little faces of the inmates reddened by the violent rubbings; many threw back their heads, fearing the first encounter. They wanted to compensate themselves in those few moments for the maternal abstinence, for the restriction of the noblest of instincts imposed upon them by poverty.

The orderly formation of the inmates was instantaneously disrupted. The grey uniforms were drowned in the whirlpools formed by the several groups. The women grasped the children about their necks and cried, speaking to them with the incoherence of emotion:

"Mammy's pet . . . Sweetheart . . . Darling!"

Their brothers rubbed their tattered clothes against the

grey uniforms they admired, and not knowing what to say to them, silently showed them their rough toys, their treasures, the shining soldier's buttons, torn cards, tops, pictures from illustrated papers kept in sweaty creases between their flesh and their shirt.

An old workman walked alone beside an inmate. Poor boy! He had no mother; he was even worse off than the others! The horny hand, covered with the scales of work, caressed the cheeks of the child, and the bearded face was upturned, for the old man thought it improper for his sex to cry.

"Here's a copper for you: I was keeping it for a game of cards. . . . Study a lot. . . . Be good. Don't give any trouble to those gentlemen."

The inmates advanced slowly amid the kisses, the tears, and the advice. Many cried, but without halting their march, with the automatic passivity of soldiers, as if they were attracted by the gloomy mouth of the monumental entrance. There the last outbursts of love took place, and when their children had disappeared, the poor women stood still, looking through their tears, with stupid fixity at the king who, sword in hand, tops Churriguera's architectural pile.

Isidro also met his mother when the inmates returned to the Orphanage from their walk. She rushed at him as the other women did, breaking the line of inmates, and embraced him, crying. Isidra knew how her son was progressing.

"My mistress is very pleased with you. . . . The teachers speak a lot about you. Study all you can, my son. Who knows what you may become some day? Maybe you'll be the pride of the family."

And while the poor woman spoke to her son amidst sobs of emotion, Capitán jumped about him trying to lick his face. Maltrana picked him up in his arms and thus went on to the entrance of the Orphanage, listening to his mother and crying, moved by the caresses and squeals of his old companion in poverty.

One day his mother was not alone as she waited for him.

A man dressed in white accompanied her, a bricklayer whom Isidro remembered as a neighbour in the big house and a chum of his father. He was a quiet man who seldom went to the tavern. According to the women of the district, he had been abandoned by his wife, a worthless wretch who had cut loose after embittering his existence. Maltrana was glad to see him. He had always had a great liking for "the neighbour," as he always called him. Many a time, when Maltrana was a little tot, the bricklayer had come into their room. Maltrana used to sit on his knees, pulling his coarse moustache, and asked him questions about his adventurous life. He was an Aragonese, sober of words, rough, frugal, accustomed to obedience. He had been a soldier in the colonies and a member of the civil guard in the Peninsula. From his years of discipline, he had retained a great respect for all strong government, a habit of submission that made him endure with unshakable good nature all kinds of disappointments.

He stood before the boy without knowing what to say, smiling at him sheepishly. Finally, he caressed his head with a hard hand in which the plaster had marked with a network of filaments the scales of his skin.

"Keep on being a good boy," he said in a rough, slow voice that seemed to come from the very pit of his stomach. "Don't worry your poor mother."

And the boy became used to seeing Señor José every Sunday, just as if he had been one of the family.

One day the bricklayer appeared alone, and before the boy had entered the Orphanage, he explained his mother's absence. Isidra was ill; nothing of any account; she would have to stay at home a couple of weeks without coming to see him. And when she managed to come from that far away district, where the miserable working people crowd together, she was thinner and yellowish, carrying in her arms a bundle of clothes whence issued a desperate cry and a pair of tiny hands clenched with rage.

"Look at him, Isidro. . . . It is Pepin; it is your brother. Kiss him, my son."

Maltrana kissed the unexpected brother who had so

suddenly made his appearance into the family. He saw in the bundle of damp, evil-smelling clothes an enormous head upon a slender neck, a feeble body promising a homeliness equal to his own.

From that day, he divided his caresses between the baby and poor Capitán, who seemed jealous of the guest who was monopolizing the attention of the whole family.

When in later years he had become acquainted with the realities of life, Maltrana, had reconstructed the vulgar adventure of his mother and had judged it good-naturedly. The poor woman, in her loneliness, had felt herself attracted by " the neighbour," who was as lonely as herself. The two unfortunates had become united.

Besides, she needed some support, as she declared to her son a little before she died. Her work did not give her even enough to eat, and that sober and kind workman who seldom went to the tavern and who met misfortunes silently, without outbursts of rage and without beatings, was worth a good deal more than her husband.

They lived " heaped together "—according to the neighbours—but their irregular state was not in the slightest shocking in the big house, where poverty favoured certain relations worthy of the severest censure.

Señor José, with his superstitious submission to the established order of things, wanted to set matters right. He did not go to mass, but he felt a great respect for religion, as being one of those regulations that help a man to keep straight. That is why he wanted to get married as God has ordered it. The bad woman who had embittered his matrimonial life, had probably died in the hospital of San Juan de Dios, or in the gutter. The thing was to get her death certificate, and then they would get married right away. But Isidra absolutely refused to do this. How about her son ? Would they not expel Isidrin from the Orphanage if they found out he had a father who was able to support him ? . . . She wanted to keep him there ; she wanted him to be learned, seeing that, according to the teachers, he was very promising, and her mistress was more and more inclined to make a gentleman out of him and

give him a career. She had faith in her son's future. He would become a rich man and a personage. Who could tell? She might spend her old age in a palace, keeping a carriage and wearing big hats, just as the ladies did in whose houses she had to work like a beast of burden? . . .

"My Isidro has a lot of luck. He'll find someone to push him on until he is able to fend for himself."

During the great holidays of the year, the boy was allowed out of the Orphanage to spend the day with his protectress. Isidra hid herself in the kitchen, with the other servants, when she saw her son in the dining-room, sitting next to her mistress and talking with her friends, all of them personages of imposing gravity. They questioned the boy in order to ascertain how far he had progressed, and he astonished them all with the rapidity and cocksureness of his answers. Their questions did not bother him in the slightest! . . . Isidra, hiding behind a portière, called to the other servants that they might admire the boy. He was the very Child Jesus arguing with the doctors in the Temple, just as she had seen them in certain pictures.

The mistress was very well satisfied with her protégé. The encomiums which her friends—serious-minded people not given to praise—heaped upon the boy, were taken by her as most flattering to her self-conceit. Isidro was her work. Besides, she loved him because of his quiet temperament and his timidity, which kept him sitting on a chair for hours and hours without endangering in the least the cleanliness of her drawing-room or the orderly arrangement of its furniture, things about which she was extremely fussy.

Finding him such a wise boy, she wanted to make him a priest. But Maltrana, in spite of his timidity, received her offer with an unmistakable gesture of displeasure. Was he not inclined to the priesthood as a vocation? . . . The good lady did not wish to force his will. He could study anything he wished; after all, any profession was good enough to serve God and to defend the healthy doctrines of decent people.

Maltrana began to study for his bachelor's degree without leaving the Orphanage. Each year he gave his protectress and his mother new motives for satisfaction and pride. Prizes, honorary certificates, flattering reports from the director, who felt very proud of the fact that his institution was hatching such a prodigy.

"He fairly swallows the books," Isidra would say. "I don't know where I got this phenomenon."

Señor José saw him only occasionally. Isidra did not dare take him to her mistress's house for fear she would find out their illegal state. Isidro did not go out any longer with the other inmates, and when the bricklayer met him by chance, he spoke to the boy respectfully, as if he could foresee in him a future representative of that constituted authority which was an object of religious adoration to him.

"You are doing fine, boy. Keep at your books. You will go far . . . I know what I am talking about, for I have seen many a big man in my day."

And he thought of his own son, his Pepin, who was seven years old and had already broken the heads of several children in the neighbourhood. He was a real genius at tripping people up and at landing a stone just in the exact place he had aimed at. Pepin belonged to another race, namely, his father's. He was born to obey, to stay down.

When Maltrana received his bachelor's degree, the lady took him to her own house. He could no longer continue at the Orphanage, and it was utterly unworthy of a coming savant, of a gentleman, to live in his mother's hovel. Isidro began to study Philosophy and Letters at the Universidad Central. He wanted to become a Doctor of Letters, then a professor, then . . . who knows what he could attain? . . .

The lady admired his correct habits as much as his industry. When the classes ended, he usually accompanied some professor home, thus prolonging his studies. Those kind gentlemen, aware of his origin, treated him very affectionately.

Afterwards, when he came home, he shut himself up in his room which was full of books. His benefactress gauged

the advance of his knowledge by the number of books that surrounded him. Her generosity readily enabled him to make new acquisitions, and Maltrana, in full intoxication of knowledge, eagerly took advantage of it. A flood of books invaded his room, and after spreading over the furniture, leaving on it stacks of printed paper, it overflowed into the adjoining hall. She saw some of them printed in queer characters which, according to her protégé, were Greek ; some were in Latin like prayer books. Those written in French, German or English perturbed her with the mystery of their incomprehensible pages. What could those tomes say ? Probably they were not all in favour of religion and decent habits. The simple soul of the good woman accepted knowledge as a useful thing, for humanity was guided by it; and she admitted it was worthy of the greatest honours ; but in her heart of hearts she felt aversion and mistrust towards it, looking upon it as a useful weapon to defend oneself against the world's evils, but one that was in itself deadly and dangerous. Seeing Maltrana at all hours deep in his studies, she felt misgivings for the wellfare of his soul. She then put on her *mantilla,* and dressed in black and with her rosary twisted around her wrist, entered the student's room.

" Isidrin, my son. You'll kill yourself studying so much. . . . Come with me."

She took him away to mass or the novena, to those Temples where famous preachers had been announced to preach. Maltrana closed his books without the least sign of displeasure and suddenly jumped from the revolutionary philosophy he was devouring with the anxiety of a novice, to the fetichistic and narrow piousness of the old woman, who believed in all miracles, and was fonder of the saints than of God.

He accepted the servitude without any effort, even with a certain pleasure, as a manifestation of the gratitude he felt for the kind soul who had pulled him from the lowest social stratum to transplant him into a healthier soil.

With the grave and respectful demeanour of a servant who has been born in the house and is bound to the mistress

by a certain affection, he lent her his arm to go up and down the stairs, and accompanied her to the churches, seeking the best places in order that she might enjoy the mystic ceremonies with the greatest possible comfort.

The old lady's relatives avoided her house, displeased at the maternal affection she bestowed on the student. It was merely envy on the part of heirs who considered themselves despoiled by the intruder, by the son of the "charwoman," as they called her in spiteful tones. If perchance coming back from church, they met the old woman and her protégé in the street, Maltrana could read in their eyes their hatred against him.

"You'll get the 'pot' . . . thief!" their eyes seemed to tell him.

And at the same time, they smiled and applauded his progress at the university, with honeyed words, as if they were afraid to make any enemy of him.

The old lady's excellent health seemed to mock the egotistic thoughts of her family. She looked younger and younger every day.

"I will last a long time yet," she used to tell her protégé whenever she spoke of her own age. "I hope to see you a great man; I shall be present when you marry a kind Christian young lady whom I will choose for you, and shall also be godmother to your children. . . ."

"I hope you will live many, many years," answered Maltrana gravely, and the emotion he felt at her kind words brought tears to his eyes.

One day, when he came home from the University, he found the house in great commotion. The lady was in bed with her eyes shut, her forehead wrapped in strong-smelling bandages, her mouth livid and half opened by painful groans. She had fallen to the floor, suddenly struck by an epileptic fit. The doctors had turned the house upside down, ordering desperate remedies; the relatives arrived, anxious and out of breath, utterly disconcerted by the unexpected news.

The lady died the following day. Her family treated Maltrana with a certain kindness, consulting him as to the

arrangements for the funeral. The dead lady's will was unknown to them. They respected Maltrana, fearing that he might be, after all, the owner of everything. Some of them even mentioned to him that they would like to have certain pieces of furniture belonging to the dead lady. The young man remained in the house several days, surveying the search instituted by the relatives, watching them poke their hands into drawers that had not been opened for years, scattering on the floor old clothes and forgotten objects. They ransacked the house from top to bottom, flinging things around with as much haste and confusion as if they had been a band of thieves.

However, two weeks passed without the least trace of a testament, without the merest scrap of paper indicative of the lady's will turning up. The lady confident in her health, thinking that she would live to be a ripe old age, had never thought of her protégé's fate and had put off for some future day the making of a will, superstitiously fearing that she would attract death if she prepared for it.

The attitude of the relatives changed suddenly ; Maltrana was allowed to remain in his room without being called by anyone. The relatives searched and made inventories on their own account and forgot him. When they saw him, their looks were hard, their words harsh, as if they wanted to avenge themselves, once and for all, for the adulation with which they had treated him and for the fear they had felt for him.

The order to leave a house which was no longer his came from one of the lady's nephews, the very one whom she had hated because of his egotistic nature and because he had cheated her in regard to some money matters. He was the leader of the relatives, imbuing them with fear and respect. He was a member of Parliament, a big landowner in Castile, who had made speeches in favour of religion and of grain, and who considered all governments radical and lax because they did not put in gaol advocates of free thought, and those who supported the free importation of foreign grain with the futile pretext that it cheapened bread.

Maltrana listened silently to the sonorous harangue of the important personage. There was nothing for him to do in a house that did not belong to him. The dead lady had made no provision for him ; probably she had some good reason for this ; she had done enough in raising him from his low status. But the relatives, anxious to carry out even the slightest wish of the late lamented, had decided to look after him until he should finish his studies. They were going to give him three thousand *pesetas* at once, but they would have nothing further to do with him. Besides, he could take all his books with him, but it was absolutely necessary that he should leave the house as soon as possible.

And the nephew, pulling out his note-book to give Maltrana three one-thousand *pesetas* notes, for which he did not fail to ask a receipt, treated the young man to another speech reeking with good advice. One has to look life squarely in the face ; life is not a joke, my young friend. Up till then, he had done nothing but play, leading a carefree existence with that lady, who was a saint. (Here a bow for the saint, who was worthy of the greatest respect because she had died without making her will). One has to work, young man. Three thousand *pesetas* are a little fortune ; many people started life with less and became millionaires. He could finish his studies and be a worthy man.

" Your life, so far, has been a dream ; don't forget that." continued the orator. " And you must not be a dreamer. You must be practical."

After this advice, Don Gaspar Jimenez, first marquis of Jimenez—a papal title he had obtained through a prelate friend of his, thanks to some cash contributed more or less reluctantly to Peter's pence—condescended to shake the young man by the hand and again requested him to disappear as soon as possible.

Maltrana went away with all his books to a lodging-house where some of his fellow students lived, close to the University. His student days were for him a revelation of the joys of life.

Occasionally, he went in the afternoon to the Sacramental de San Martín, a handsome, peaceful, garden-like cemetery that had been closed for years, but where his benefactress had had a niche reserved for her, next to her husband. He was the only one who visited her grave. The relatives, busy with the division of the estate and with threatening each other with lawsuits, did not think of replacing by a marble slab the oilcloth with gilt cardboard letters that covered the grave. The cemetery—appropriate to a novel—with its groups of erect cypresses, its Oriental columns and its beds of roses, awakened in the young man a sweet melancholy, reviving in his memory the kind lady's image.

This impression vanished as soon as Isidro returned at night to the cafés near the University, where the students formed merry parties to the accompaniment of a piano and a cornet—the orchestra of the establishment.

"Life is Joy," he used to say sententiously. "We must look upon life from the Hellenic point of view."

And the poor boy's Hellenism consisted in smoking, drinking Maraschino—the only liqueur tolerated by his Greek palate—sending love letters, in classic verses, to seamstresses or to the daughters of certain middle-class ladies who frequented the Café de Pelaez or the Café de la Universidad, and disappearing for half an hour into one of the doorways in the neighbouring streets, taking with him some unfortunate wretch who was walking the street waiting for a customer.

Maltrana continued his studies with the usual good results, in spite of his Hellenic joy. His mother wanted him to remain in the lodging house ; a savant could not live in a suburban hut, amid bricklayers, labourers and casual workers ! What would his friends say ? . . . The poor woman, when the lady's death shattered her dreams, adhered more tenaciously than ever to her belief in her son's glory, to her desire that he should escape the miserable circle in which he had been born. But her faith was not the same as it had been ; she began to have doubts of his future when she saw him devoid of all protection. Perhaps

he would stop in the middle of the road, without reaching his goal.

Life in her home was harder than ever. Señor José was idle for weeks at a time. Pepin, now eleven years old, was so wicked that his neighbours had nicknamed him Barrabas. Every month he started a new trade, but they always dismissed him, declaring that he was the most impudent of apprentices. In order to make a little money, the poor mother was helping a laundress, and in the winter mornings she went down to the river, starving with hunger, her emaciated body shivering at contact with the water.

One day Barrabas appeared at his brother's house and coolly told him that his mother was in the hospital. She had caught cold or pneumonia or something like that in the river. All the ragamuffin could tell was that she was very sick, and that two laundresses had had to help her to the hospital.

His mother was lying in bed. Her cheeks were red, her skin burning, and through her purple lips escaped the agonized breaths from her congested lungs. Remembering the money he kept at home, Maltrana felt ashamed to see his mother with the other patients in that mournful room of bare walls.

He had her removed to a private room ; he would pay all the expenses. And he spent the afternoons by his mother's bedside, listening to her words of advice and encouraging her with his hopes for the future. The poor woman begged him that when he rose in the world he would not forget Señor José and his son. That man was very good to her and had courageously helped her in the worst times of her miserable existence. Their living together came about without any preconceived plan—the result of their companionship in their struggle against poverty. Isidro ought to respect the bricklayer as if he were his own father. Señor José had loved her more than the other . . . the legal husband. He showed it in his desperate silence, in the painful gesture when he saw her in the hospital bed.

The poor woman died at the end of three months, after

having made a considerable dent in Maltrana's very moderate capital.

Really, life was not merry; life had lost its Hellenic aspect.

Impelled by sadness, Maltrana considered his situation. He would have to set out upon a new route. He had scarcely enough money to complete his studies. He lacked one term before taking his bachelor's degree, and two for his doctorate. And when he had his degree, what was he to do? . . . .

Pessimism was laying hold on Maltrana. What was the use of graduating? His studies were not a guarantee of knowledge, they were merely routine. He had seen a lot and knew what he was about. The University, like all social institutions, was nothing but a lie. Should he enter his name for a competitive lectureship; his fellow students would admire him, some cantankerous professor would give him his vote, but he would not obtain the position. Men like him, alone in the world, without influence, without social distinction, were unarmed for the daily struggle; their destiny is to die.

He loved science for its own sake, for its joys, for the egotistic voluptuousness of acquiring knowledge. Hurrah for free science! What mattered that scrap of paper that would certify to his knowledge, but would cost him two more years of misery? In order to be a philosopher, one need not go to a University. The great men admired by him had not been professors, nor had they any academic titles. Schopenhauer, his idol of the moment, mocked at the philosophy which climbs to the rostrum in order to make itself understood.

He would be an independent thinker; he would be a writer. And Maltrana, philosopher at nineteen years, and with but a trace of a moustache, flung himself into the world. He avoided the students' cafés, lived in the centre of the city and passed from one to the other of the groups that constitute the tumultuous and unmanageable Republic of Letters.

In the afternoons, he frequented the Atheneum in order

to read foreign reviews, so as to be posted on the progress of universal thought, and to be able to crush certain ignorant chums of his who tried to astonish their *unpublished* friends because, forsooth, they had published some verses in the newspapers. Besides, he continued to buy books in spite of his poverty. He could not rid himself of this habit, acquired in the good days of his generous benefactress. He did without meals, or prolonged the life of his dilapidated boots in order to be able to buy a book newly imported from Paris. His library, built up under the protection of the good lady, was gradually diminishing, due to the accidents of exchange. He sold some books in order to buy others. All the second-hand booksellers knew Maltrana and his trades. Five celebrated philosophers, with the leaves somewhat wrinkled, were worth one mediocre novelist just out of the press ; three famous poets were the equivalent of a second-hand sociological treatise in which Maltrana found an awkward resumé of things that were only too well known.

The evenings, he spent at the Fornos Restaurant, at a table where sat future geniuses, all as ignorant as himself but fully convinced that history would have a good deal to say about them. Some were younger than Maltrana. None had written anything, but by their outward appearance they all revealed to the world their intention to create immortal works, for they adjusted themselves to the traditional make-up : flowing hair, large hats, wide loose ties, or narrow ones that wound themselves around high collars which reached their ears.

The literary measles took on virulent forms that filled Maltrana with terror. In spite of their youth, those lads knew everything, as if they had begun to read books when they were in their nurses' arms. Their criticisms resounded, terrible, inexorable, concise, capable of making the very café tables shake with fear. All the Spanish writers were dunces, fools, idiots, with other epithets that would be relished only by coarse palates. Then, stick in hand, they crossed the Pyrenees. Zola ! . . . a boor, with a little talent. Victor Hugo ! . . . a very eloquent gentleman,

but he was not a poet. Lamartine ! . . . a whiner . . . no poet either. Musset ! . . . he was rather more of a poet, but very little. The true, the only poets, were those whom they revered, and with eyes upturned, trembling with admiration, they mentioned name after name of men whose obscurity and meagre production were in themselves a great merit, according to them, and they placed them above those celebrated authors who decade themselves by trying to make themselves understood by the whole world, by the miserable mob and the filthy bourgeoisie.

Maltrana finally got tired of those gatherings. Besides, the men of genius took a dislike to him because of some injudicious jokes which his culture had allowed him to play on them, inventing books and authors and confessing his fraud when they had all fallen into the trap, swearing that they knew the works and giving details of their beauties and defects.

A friend wished to patronize him.

" All these fellows here don't amount to anything. I'll take you to a gathering of real writers. Great poets . . . people who have published successfully."

And in the afternoons, he frequented a bar which served as a meeting place for a group of writers who inspired the timid Maltrana with the deepest respect. Isidra's son felt greatly confused in the company of two marquises, who were poets, and several young men related to some very important people. They all dressed with punctilious elegance ; they followed fashion even to exaggeration. Their thick manes, shining with brilliantine, were the only indication of their literary enthusiasm.

" The body of a dandy and the head of a poet," said one of them to Isidro, thus briefly stating the canons of his desideratum in outward appearance.

The admiring silence with which the young man listened to them earned him their appreciation.

One day he ventured to speak of Greek poetry, criticizing Aristophanes and his comedies as irreverently as if the famous writer had been one of the café habitués. He even

recited whole scenes in Greek, though nobody could understand him. The young dandies showed their admiration. "Very curious!" . . . "Most interesting!" They then began to pay some attention to him and praised his unfathomable eyes and his powerful overhanging eyebrows. Someone admired his manly homeliness, his coarse rebellious hair, finding some resemblance between his head and that of Beethoven. One of the marquises, in a sudden fit of admiration, moved his chair close to that Beethoven who spoke Greek, and sat rubbing elbows with him all the afternoon.

Maltrana was not long in realizing that all those people were worth very little. Only one, the oldest, the master, was worthy of respect. He was a very talented author and constantly appeared in a melancholy mood, as if the weaknesses of life weighed on his mind, covering it with a pall of intense sadness. The irony of his words sounded like a mockery of his fragile will. All were united by aberrations of taste rather than by sincere admiration for literature.

In Maltrana's presence, they gossiped about the absent members of the clique, changing the gender of their names and making them feminine. "Enrigueta thinks she has talent, but she is nothing but a dish-washer. . . ." "Pepa's comedy is not worth a rap. . . ." At night they all went into what they called society, parties attended by their families or theatre boxes belonging to the nobility. Ladies gave them their confidences, speaking to them with the freedom engendered by lack of all danger. Afterwards, their meetings at the bar were but a continuation of the feminine gossiping and all of them mentioned with hostile delectation the hidden imperfections of the most famous ladies, as if the weaknesses and pettinesses of an enemy sex delighted them.

They were refined, subtle, bitterly opposed to vile matter, to prosaic life and to violent emotions. They published books of poetry with more blank than printed pages. Each group of verses was protected by several virgin leaves, like a hot-house flower that might die if touched by the street air. They detested the impiety of the masses, the

realities of a vulgar life ; they called themselves Catholics, anarchists and aristocrats at the same time ; they thought very little about religion, but they spoke, turning their eyes to heaven, of the sweetness of monstrous sin and the voluptuousness of repentance followed by relapse. They found a certain distinction in the old liturgy of the Church, and entitled their microscopic poems Psalms, Litanies or Novenaries.

Some wrote satirical comedies on the habits of the aristocracy—which happened to be their own too—theatrical pieces in which the tailor collaborated with the poet, and no elegant *toilette* failed to have a love affair with a *frac*, which never was that of the husband.

" We must flagellate them ! " they shouted with a terrifying expression.

And Maltrana thought with a smile :

" All right. But, who is going to flagellate you ? "

From time to time certain men of bestial aspect and coarse manners, who addressed them in the familiar form and spoke to them with the contemptuous superiority of the strong male, came to their meetings. They were unsuccessful bullfighters, ex-civil guards, tram conductors who dressed like gentlemen, and showed themselves perfectly satisfied with their lot. Some spoke of their wives and children and justified their extraordinary occupation by their love for their families.

" We must do what we can. Times are hard, and one has to grab the first thing that comes along."

CHAPTER III

TIRED of fruitless meetings and harassed by want, he had to turn his thoughts to the struggle for his daily bread. Nothing remained of the money from his benefactress.

His friends saw him only at the Atheneum, reading reviews, or at the National Library, hunting up information for erudite and academic writers who rewarded his labours with a paltry sum. From time to time, a friend gave him a book to translate, pocketing half the amount paid for the job. Besides, he used to write, at the rate of ten centimes a sheet, certain articles for a weekly sociological paper, which the editor signed, thus giving a practical example of the fact that property is not sacred, nor anything like it.

Isidro, after going from one lodging house to another, saving as best he could the remains of his library from the landladies who pursued him because he owed them money, was finally forced to climb the hill of Cuatro Caminos, and sought shelter with Señor José, in Artistas Street. The kindheartedness of the good lady had pulled him away from this poverty-stricken quarter, and now he was returning to it, more unhappy and less fitted for the struggle for life than the rough people who were condemned to manual labour.

From then on, he lived with his step-father and with his brother Pepin, who worked as an apprentice bricklayer. His new life brought him into contact with his mother's relatives.

She had two brothers, old rag-pickers of Bellavista who had finally settled in the Rastro. One of them used to place his stand in the Ribera de Curtidores, and his speciality

was weapons and ancient musical instruments which he displayed with great artistry. Another was the great man of the family ; all his relatives spoke respectfully of him because of his wealth. He had pulled through many big deals ; he could hardly scrawl his signature, but he fancied himself an antiquarian and had his shop in the courtyard of the old Americas.

Both knew their nephew Maltrana very slightly ; his fame as a wise man had reached them. They thought a great deal of him, however, because they expected him to inherit his benefactress's estate. The first time he went to see them with his mother, they gave him a great welcome. Afterwards, when he came alone, they received him affectionately, thinking that he had inherited the estate and that he was in a fair way to become a personage. But when they saw that at each succeeding visit he had an air of increasing poverty, for the knees and elbows of his suit shone with use and his boots were the worse for wear, they spoke to him very coldly and with evident suspicion.

" They are afraid I will ask them for some money," Maltrana said to himself.

And as he lived at the other end of Madrid, he did not visit his relatives at the Rastro again.

His grandmother, Señora Eusebia, one of the oldest rag-pickers, who was known as Mariposa, lived beyond Tetuan, in the district of Carolinas, the rag-pickers' quarter.

Maltrana used to see her at her little brick house, which was considered to be the best building in the district, yet he could touch the eaves of the old tile roof with his hands.

In the court in front of the house, two black, lean pigs snorted, stirring the rubbish with their snouts. Some hens were feeding in a half barrelful of mashed chick-peas and beans, which together with olive stones formed a disgusting mass—the remains of meals gathered in the city houses, residues of the repasts on which Madrid fed.

The old woman greeted him lovingly and respectfully, for she considered him to be the glory of the family. Her lachrymose reddened eyes caressed him, yet she did not dare to embrace or touch him with her black, bony hands,

the fingers of which were loaded with tin rings. Her witch-nose and prominent chin stuck out from a red kerchief that bound her temples. A piece of shawl, tied at the waist with a string, served her as corsets and sash. Her bodice of black silk faded by time, open at several places, showed through the fabric her yellowish-white chemise or her parched flesh, of a greenish colour like that of oxidized bronze. She wore slippers of different colours and sizes: one red, the other blue, acquired at random in the picking. Her skirt was decorated with patches, but these superimposed rags did not entirely conceal the embroidery on the original velvet.

Maltrana noticed with bitter commiseration the old woman's small bleary eyes, her sunken mouth submerged in a sea of wrinkles that moved goatishly as she spoke, her cheeks varnished with dirt, polished and shining and on which contact with water must have produced the painful effect of a dynamite explosion. And to think that he was descended from that being! To think that his flesh was her flesh! . . .

The old woman received him with expressions of deep admiration. How handsome! What a fine gentleman!

The whole district knew her enthusiasm for that grandson of hers who was a savant, a future personage about whom, acording to her, all Madrid was talking.

She stopped picking in the rubbish heaps and made Maltrana sit down on the best piece of furniture the house afforded—a seat from an old street car she had bought with the help of her comrade Señor Polo. In order to make the gigantic purchase, they had had to join their respective fortunes.

Señora Eusebia could not look at Isidro without immediately bewailing her daughter's sad fate.

She had wanted to become a Madrileña; she had felt ashamed of being a rag-picker. That's why she spent her life in continual misery. First of all, she left their district to become a servant. A servant, when her mother had an honest trade and a chunk of bread! . . . All the merchants in Tetuan were after her; and they were not mere

nobodies who go to Madrid with a bag over their shoulder and pick up the rubbish of any house whatever, but real merchants who owned a cart and donkey, and stood in front of the railings of the Castellana mansions like real gentlemen, and walked up to the very best flats in Serrano Street.

"Aunt Mariposa, I like your girl. . . . Señora Eusebia, I want to be your son-in-law."

All the business men in Carolinas, Almenara and Bellavista asked the mother for her girl, but the wench stubbornly scorned even the best merchants and fell in love with an insignificant bricklayer who worked near her master's house. At last, she had had her own way and got married. They lived in one of those big ramshackle houses that look like a gloomy beehive ; she suffered hunger every day and got a thrashing once a week ; she had to endure cold, washing at the river bank in order to earn a loaf of bread, and then, as a grand finale she had died in the hospital. There's your nice little bricklayer for you ! And all this, poor fool ! for the pleasure of living in Madrid, of being a lady and of looking over her shoulder at the poor rag-pickers. . . . Was not her parents' trade as honourable as any other ?

"We pay our taxes, Isidrin, as much as any business man who owns a store in Pestas Street. You should see what we have to pay the City for our permit : a devil of a lot of money. And as for our customers, we have marquises and counts as good as those who buy at Sobrino's store. You meet people worth while in our business. Do you see this skirt ? Well, it was given me by a lady of the court who was on very intimate terms with the sovereigns. Do you see this bodice ? Well, it belonged to a very pretty actress about whom the papers spoke a lot ; the poor thing is dead now."

And the old woman minutely explained the advantages of her trade. There was nothing but profits to it. Of course, being such a learned gentleman, he was not interested in those details, but it would do him no harm to know them. As she was all alone, she had hired a boy,

son of a neighbour who had died. He looked after the donkey and drove the cart when early in the morning they started on their way towards Madrid. He went up to the different flats, while his mistress stood in the street looking after the vehicle. When they returned home, at about noon, her first occupation was to sort the food-stuffs. She deposited in a little barrel the remainders from certain houses whose masters were very clean and who thoughtfully set apart the food that was left over from their meals. She knew all her customers well, and had them classified according to the state of their health. She knew by heart a list of those houses whose masters were in the pink of health, and one of those whose unfortunate owners were bent down by a chronic cough or were afflicted with some disgusting disease.

"I have a pair of golden hands when it comes to cooking; do you hear me, youngster? I heat up the best food I get, and the meals I make with it are famed throughout the district. If I were soft, Uncle Polo would never leave my house. He is very fond of all I cook. . . . And such an abundance of it, my goodness! I have enough every day to feed a whole regiment. . . . And the surprises we get! Sometimes, you think you are eating beans and you suddenly bump up against a piece of real beefsteak. Sometimes we have found, among the mashed potatoes, those little black things, like pieces of coal, which are called truffles and which the gentry pay for as if they were gold. No wonder my servant lad is rosy and fat like an High Priest. You can't pinch him . . . you know where, his flesh is so hard, and when I took him in he was as hungry as a wolf. . . . I have some very good customers, Isidrin."

And right away she inveighed against the other homes, those whose masters left the remains from their tables mixed up with all sorts of rubbish. What kitchens, my Lord! The servants were swine and the ladies sluts. The remains of their stews had potato peelings, withered cabbage leaves, fruit stones and pieces of cork. Sometimes she had found sewing needles, threads, thimbles and even toys in the soup. And to think that some of her

neighbours, who did not have better homes to call at, had to feed themselves with that kind of rubbish, after cleaning it the best they could! . . . She gave that sort of thing to her pigs. That is why the suburban dealers paid a better price for them than anybody else. She fed them exclusively on the remains from the gentry's tables. She did not dare give them *other things* the greedy animals were very fond of; she had too much conscience for that.

She became very enthusiastic over the opulence that surrounded her. She had bread by the carload; some days she filled two whole bags with pieces of bread, and even the hens, absolutely fed up, refused to eat any more. When she got up in the mornings, she had a cup of excellent coffee. Grounds were given her, in some of the houses, after the coffee had been made, and she spread them on a newspaper in her yard, dried them in the sun and kept them for her breakfast. She had a whole paper bag full of them.

The house was her own; in her yard she had a stack of straw, higher than the roof, which after breaking up thoroughly, she sold for making bricks; her animals were fed without any expense whatever, and she and the boy, besides their food, were sure of their wearing apparel, for as long as the people of Madrid wore clothes, they would not go about naked.

"Wine is the only thing I buy; in the Carolinas no one drinks water. The babies are weaned with grape milk. But for a small sum, they give me a bottle that lasts me all day. Here, outside the city, wine is almost given away. . . ."

And after her bodily wants had been well satisfied, there remained to her, as a net profit, the findings in the rubbish heaps, the unexpected discoveries.

Maltrana had heard people talk about his grandmother's wealth, a hidden treasure which furnished the whole district with a subject of conversation.

"Mariposa, there's a rich woman for you," exclaimed the rag-pickers in the tavern. "She is a lucky one. She goes only to the homes of the nobility. The things that woman must have found!"

The famous Coleta, when he had reached the verbose period of his drunken fits, declared he had found the old woman counting her treasure in a corner of her yard, and he closed his eyes the better to remember the jewels, the pieces of silver, the piles of coins that had fairly dazzled him.

The young man always wound up his conversations with the old woman by making the same request.

"Granny, they tell me you are very rich. Come on, show me your treasure."

Señora Eusebia protested. She rich? . . . That was a lie of idle people, an invention of Coleta and other drunkards, an obsession of Uncle Polo, who had been chasing her ever since she became a widow, and after having killed four wives wanted her to be the fifth. She was a poor woman; she owned nothing. And as she said this, she smiled enigmatically; her eyes shone maliciously, giving people to understand that her treasure was a reality . . . but that no one would ever see it.

Sundays were the only days when Maltrana spoke to Señor José and saw his brother. When he arrived, early in the morning, at Cuatro Caminos, he found Pepin already in the middle of the street recruiting other boys for some excursion to Amiel, a sort of *razzia* that alarmed the tavern keepers of the picnic grounds.

When Maltrana got up, he settled his account with his stepfather, giving him what he could for the rent of the room. Then the pair of them, depending on the condition of their purses, went away to eat cheap steak and spring lamb in a *rôtisserie* at Cuatro Caminos, or chicken prepared in some tavern of the district of Punta Brava.

They ate in the open air, sitting on hard stools at a small, red, round table. The trams arrived packed full of people from Madrid. The merry-makers, clad in shawls and blouses, with wide-brimmed hats and black caps, scattered themselves among the bake-houses and taverns in search of wine and food, much cheaper than in the city because they were sold outside the octroi limits. The pianos sounded their hurried tunes, punctuating the scales with the tinkling of a bell; the couples interrupted their

meal to take a turn or two at a waltz ; the awnings of the merry-go-rounds, with their childish horses and carriages, turned round and round ; above the roofs appeared with rhythmical motion the skiffs of the swings, with women standing up, hanging to the ropes, their skirts tightly held between their legs, and cackling like hens, and on the blue background of the sky the red and yellow percale of the flags fluttered in an atmosphere of fried oil and melted suet.

Maltrana listened silently to Señor José. The bricklayer was fond of talking to men of learning, to men of discernment. Although the young man was only Isidra's son, his education had converted him into a superior being, one of those whom the former civil guard revered as the shepherds of mankind appointed by a mysterious power he had never taken the trouble to discover. When he was with the young man, the bricklayer gave vent to his sluggish oratory in a monotonous raucous voice. He could not talk to his fellow workers ; he did not agree with them ; they insulted him, calling him a reactionary, a sheep, and casting into his teeth the fact that he had been a civil guard.

" You are a man of learning, Isidro," he would say. " You can think, and that is why you are able to understand me and to do me justice better than those asses. . . . And what do I tell them, that they should call me sheep ? I tell them that this business about the poor man getting the upper hand of the rich man, and about the servant lording it over his master, is all nonsense ; that there have always been some people with money and some without it, and that it will always be so. That all these meetings and societies do nothing but swell the workman's head, so that he will rush into the street and get himself licked by the police. What interests the wage earner is to find a place where he can get a job, and to behave himself so that his masters may help him along with a pittance. . . . And it also makes me mad that at all those meetings they should tackle the priests, although, as you well know, I haven't been to mass for a long, long time. What harm can the

priests do to the working man? They at least give something; they distribute alms, keep asylums, look after the poor and preach to the rich so that they may loosen hold on their money. But those fellows who speak at the meetings about their foolish socialism and anarchism don't give a red cent. How can they, when they don't amount to anything! . . ."

As Señor José spoke of the rebellious spirits, he felt the wrath of an old supporter of law and order whose ideas had been shaped in the mould of discipline. The civil guard reappeared from under the working man's clothes. He admitted that things were not equitably divided and that the poor suffered a great deal. There were periods when he had to endure the most horrible poverty, and his own end, when he reached old age, would be to beg in the streets or to die in a hospital. But if those political quacks who preached against the rich managed to get their finger into the pie, would things become any better? . . .

"We must each do the task we have been born for, and we must be satisfied with our fate," continued the bricklayer. "I have also seen a good many things, even if I am not as learned as you are, Isidrin. . . . Which is the best organized thing in all the nations, and the one that works most smoothly? . . . The army, of course. You can't deny that. I have belonged to the army and to it I owe my education and my good manners. And what happens in the army? Well, the soldiers, who are by far its most numerous members, have to eat ordinary rations and work hard, while the officers who are not so plentiful, and the colonels and generals, who are even more scarce, eat partridges, or anything else they wish and have a much better time. Raise all the soldiers to the rank of general, as some people want and no army will be left; Reduce to the ranks all the officers, as other people would prefer, and there will be no leaders, that is to say, the result will be the same as before. Apply this to the civilian population, and you will readily understand why I think as I do. Those of us who were born to be privates, should carry the pack of toil on our shoulders without thinking of

revolutions, and without shooting our officers in the back. You were born to be an officer ; hurry up and get your commission, and see if some day you become a general."

Maltrana smiled as he listened to his stepfather. He recollected the dark stuffy den in Artistas Street, the rickety bed, the table and the two chairs that constituted its furniture; he remembered the days when the bricklayer was out of work and he had to help him out of his miserable scanty revenue.

" And what harm will it do you," asked the young man, " if the social army disbands itself, kills its officers, if it thinks fit, and sets half the world on fire ? "

" That's a good one ! " exclaimed the scandalized bricklayer. " Are you one of those who demand such atrocities ? I can hardly believe it . . . with all the books you have read. And how about order, boy ? Without order life is impossible. I remember how well an old lieutenant we had in the Civil Guards used to explain this. They would divide everything up, they would sack all the houses, and by and by we would be eating each other up like cannibals. No, boy ; just think it over. How could honest folks live without priests and without soldiers, above all without soldiers ? "

And the ex-civil guard accompanied this lugubrious question with a gesture of repulsion and horror.

" Man needs bread and blows," he added when he had calmed down. " A long whip to keep him in the right path. The world is full of crooks. Set man entirely free and you will see the mess we get into."

Finally Señor José quieted down, displaying a barbarous optimism.

" Fortunately, things are moving slowly. The agitators have no guns. Let them come out, let them come out into the open and we will show them ! That is why whenever there is a strike in my trade, I throw down my tools, so as not to make myself conspicuous ; but I go home. There is no greater pleasure than to shoot at the mob, without fear of getting an answer, save a few stones, and to pick your target at will, as if the people were ducks ! . . ."

When he said this, he clenched his hands and winked one eye, as if he were shouldering an imaginary gun. He smiled as if his bloodthirsty remembrances tickled his fancy. Maltrana, before the expression of homicidal delectation on the Aragonese's face, remembered with astonishment that the bricklayer was in reality a good man. His quiet good nature had helped to render happy the last years of poor Isidra's life ; he was a kindhearted father to the rascally Pepin. His fellow workers called him a sheep because of the servile patience with which he accepted all the injustices and hardships of his daily toil, and yet, he smiled like an executioner as he hoped for wholesale massacres and for manhunts, provided they were properly conducted under the wing of the law and carried out by men in uniform. The superstitious respect for the established order, which had been inculcated into him when he was placed in the narrow mould of discipline, assumed in his soul the harshness of a savage. According to him, society could advance only with the gaols full, an execution at every street corner and the Civil Guard discharging their rifles on any group that dared to shout hurrah ! and to wave a flag. He said this with a determination that struck horror into his hearers, and right away the mason was deeply moved by his son, the rascally Barrabas. When the latter played one of his customary pranks, the old war beast contented himself with a frown, shook his big hands at the boy and shouted in a raucous voice : " I'll give you a licking ! " But the young rascal laughed, knowing full well that he would never get it.

During working days, if the weather was good and Maltrana had a few *pesetas* in his pocket, he went to the district of Carolinas, to have lunch with his friend Mosco, the poacher, whose fame reached as far as Colmenar. The famous poacher of the royal preserves had become, through his feats, worthy of the respect of the hunters in the Sierra, though the latter gentry looked upon their colleagues of the neighbourhood of Madrid, who made their living by poaching in the woods of El Pardo, as cowardly thieves.

Mosco lived near Señora Eusebia's house in a dwelling of

loose bricks with a roof of old tiles brought from the buildings that were being torn down in the city. Outside, one of the walls was entirely covered with three rows of cages full of singing linnets, which he used as decoys to catch birds with the net. On arriving at the door, Maltrana had to make his way through a host of dogs: two handsome greyhounds, of elegant litheness, and other canines of filthy hanging wool, homely, teeming with parasites, but who enjoyed a fame equal to their master's, thanks to the wonderful tricks they could perform.

Inside was Mosco. His daughter Feliciana, who constituted his entire family, was working in a cap factory, and he was hustling from one end of the room to the other preparing the lunch, well after mid-day.

Mosco also got up very late. Maltrana had found him many a time in his working togs, a suit of corduroy spattered with mud, sandals, leggings, still wet from crossing the brooks, and a cap studded with twigs and thorns from the wild underbrush. Small, thin, of nervous agility and resolute manners, his body oscillated like a well-tempered spring. Life in the open and his piratical occupation in the woods gave him, when he was silent, a sort of repellent coarseness, similar to that of a tree or a stone. When he spoke, he at once revealed himself as a city man who had fled from the great conglomerations of mankind to lead a solitary life, in continual combat, earning a living with his arms or with his cunning, as if a distant atavism pulled him, dragging him back to the mode of living of primitive man.

Maltrana always greeted him with the same question: "How did you get on last night? . . ."

Sometimes, Mosco smiled; at others he answered with ill-natured grunts. There were magnificent nights when he killed two or three deer, which by that time had already been skinned and cut up and were being surreptitiously sold among the neighbours of Tetuan. Other nights he caught only a few rabbits, and returning home, near dawn, he stretched himself on his bed, without undressing, cursing his bad luck, and fell asleep with the exhaustion of having

spent the whole night crawling on all fours, his ear constantly on the alert thinking that he could hear now and then a shout of " Halt ! " or the whistling of a bullet.

The poachers of the neighbourhood, miserable wretches who worked during the summer in the tile kilns and only when hard pressed by hunger in the winter dared to go out poaching, worshipped Mosco. He did not set out on his expeditions as they did, without a weapon in their belts, resigned beforehand to receive a bullet or a thrashing, and to be taken to the gaol at El Escorial, to be sentenced to hard labour, without offering the least resistance. He was a man after the fashion of the wild hunters of Colmenar, rough people fond of powder, who chased the gamekeepers from tree to tree and finally forced them to take shelter in their miserable huts.

On the nights when Mosco went out with his gun, leaving his ferret at home, the mob of chicken-hearted poachers trembled with anxiety and pride. The following day, there was venison at Tetuan, and the gamekeeper who dared to pursue him ran the risk of finding himself hunted and shot at from the thickets, without warning. If there was no venison, it was because Mosco was lying in bed, bandaged and bloody, with a dose of lead under his skin.

Maltrana had admired his friend on several occasions when the latter had showed him his body with all the immodesty of a dare-devil. Two slugs inlaid in the bones of his cranium ; a wound in one shoulder and another in one leg from two round bullets that had been extracted after a painful operation by a quack of the district ; the rest of his body was a veritable sieve with small shot wounds to which he attached no importance at all, considering them paltry accidents.

The lunches Maltrana had at Mosco's house were very substantial. The young man paid for the bread and the wine, which he brought from a tavern near by, while the famous poacher placed on the table a stew of rabbits or a hare caught the previous night.

" Here's to the health of the royal family ! " exclaimed

Isidro ironically. "Long live the king, who supports his subjects! . . ."

In Mosco's house no other pieces of game could be found except those he used for his own table. He always expected to be searched; the royal gamekeepers had their eyes on his house; the civil guards had visited it many a time. There was nothing in sight to betray the inclinations of the master except the cages that hung outside during the sunny hours and the dogs that slept curled up before the door.

"I am a hunter over and above board," he said with sardonic gravity when the gamekeepers appeared. "I catch birds with a net, and I take my dogs along the walls of El Pardo in case some of the rabbits leave the enclosure. I am a mere amateur. . . . What they say about me is nothing but lies."

His gun hung hidden under the tiles of the roof; his ferret slept in the double bottom of a box covered with rags, breathing through a few holes drilled in the wood.

When Maltrana came to see him, Mosco, as a proof of affection and trust, showed him the "beast," the jewel of his household, the thing he loved most. From the bottom of the box he produced the little animal which stretched its body, supple as that of a reptile, and scratched with its claws the horny finger of the hunter. Mosco raised to his mouth the little moustachioed snout, enveloping it in his breath, while the ferret caressed his lips, sticking out its diminutive tongue in feline fashion.

"The darling!" exclaimed the hunter. "Look at it, Isidro! The best in the world. Fifty *reales* I paid for her at Colmenar. Nobody could touch her; she was a terror. She almost bit a finger off a man. She would sink her teeth into your hand and nothing in this world would make her unfasten them. I have brought her up to what she is now, and she eats off my lips and loves me as much as Feliciana. Only I can do it. If you should touch her, she would bite you. Stroke her back with your hand; see what a fine fur she has. . . . Don't be afraid, I won't let her go."

And he went on praising the repugnant, blood-thirsty animal. He could make her work seven days on end without tiring her. Sometimes she killed as many as fifty rabbits: she was always anxious to kill. He had to let her down the mouth of the burrows with a string tied to one of her legs to pull her out when she fell asleep, drunk with blood. While Mosco was speaking, he pulled out of his pocket a piece of cheese, placed between his lips a little bit which the ferret ate with comical contortions.

"The darling! Look at her again," exclaimed the hunter. "Fine and all, as she is, she lives on fifteen *centimos* worth of cheese per day."

The remembrance of another jewel he had once owned, the famous dog Puesto en Ama, moved Mosco very deeply. He had given the same name to another of his dogs, but it could not be compared with the dead one. The gamekeepers spoke of it with astonishment, and it was a real nightmare to the high officials at El Pardo! Accompanied by Puesto en Ama alone, Mosco jumped over the walls at midnight and hid near the brooks, close to the pools where the deer drank. If one of them approached, it was as good as dead. The dog set off in pursuit through the underbrush; the two animals broke the branches with the momentum of their race, creating a noise like a hurricane, and behind them ran the hunter shod with his light sandals. Puesto en Ama, catching up on the deer, bit the animal between the hind legs, and the deer fell to the ground groaning with pain until Mosco came up and killed it. A matter of a few minutes. When he had that dog, he very often needed the help of the cowardly loons of the district to carry off on their backs the animals he had killed.

The poacher almost wept with sorrow when he remembered the death of his brave comrade, the fusillade that had laid it low, the glee of the gamekeepers, in wing formation, like an army, to finish an animal possessed of more cunning than many a man, and the procession with the dead body to the village of El Pardo, where it was admired as if it had made a triumphal entrance. . . .

Mosco became very indignant when he thought of his dead dog. And the thief who had fired the finishing shot was still alive! . . . And he, Mosco, had not killed him yet! . . .

Maltrana, as he listened to the feats of such a wild life, man hunting beast and being hunted in turn by man, thought with wonder on the origin of the famous poacher.

He belonged to a family from Tetuan, but he was born in Madrid and was a printer by trade. He even reached the position of manager of a press where several magazines that had no readers were printed: but on Saturdays, he changed his clothes as soon as his work was done and ran away to Tetuan, where lay his fancy, and gave himself up to the hunt with the most renowned poachers, as if some ancestral influence, some inheritance from his forefathers, dragged him thither.

During the week, while he walked among the benches in the workshop, stained with ink and smelling of damp paper, he thought nostalgically of the hills covered with pines, cork-trees and oaks, of the bushes that opened before the snout of the deer, which instantly ran away snorting with alarm, of the large expanse of blue sky with the snow-capped peaks of the Guadarrama in the background, like a wall of silver merlons shining in the sun.

He was an unsociable person; he suffocated in the city; the streets, with their streams of people going in one direction, were repugnant to him. He finally married the daughter of a rag-picker and abandoned his trade to assume that of his wife. But he very seldom went to Madrid with the cart. Rag-picking with him was only a pretext; his real profession was hunting, following his own bent. Mosco had been born, according to his own assertions to Maltrana, for violent action, for a life of continuous adventure, risking his skin all the time. Why should he remain in a city, gathering together small lead letters, spending himself in that feminine task? . . . He was a fighting man; he liked to skirmish with Death[1] according to his own words—

[1] Death is represented by a female in Spain.

dodge her and finally pull his daily bread from under her very feet.

" I would have made a great soldier, friend Isidro. But now there are no more wars, real wars, like the old ones where a man had to use up all the force of his arm or all the cunning of his brain. Besides, I would not put on a uniform for all the money in the world ; I refuse to disguise myself as if I were going to a fancy dress ball, and I refuse to submit to discipline and regulations. . . . To be a slave, I was well enough at the printing press, where I was earning a whole *duro* per day. Ah, how many men of my nature there are in gaol to-day, who would have been heroes in times gone by ! "

He loved war, plain, savage, ingenuous war, without any humanitarian hypocrisies, without civilized disguises, old-fashioned wars where the combatants killed for the mere joy of destroying, receiving no recompense other than the booty obtained from sacking the houses and pillaging the fields of the vanquished. But he had arrived too late, he asserted in mournful tones, and for lack of a better field, he had given himself up, in the suburbs of a great city, to a prehistoric life, hunting animals in order to eat, and hunting men, whenever necessary, in order to defend himself, respecting no walls that he could scale nor any laws either, for they were represented by mortal men, just like himself.

Of his past, he retained a certain respect for authors. Hence his friendship for Isidro, whom he had met at the house of his neighbour, Señora Eusebia. Sometimes he recalled the times when he was a printer. He never read the papers on his occasional visits to Madrid, but he firmly believed that his youth had been better and that the present writers were far below the level of those he had known in his day. In spite of this, he looked at Maltrana, mentally comparing him with the great men who still lived in his memory. Had his friend read anything by So-and-so and So-and-so ? And here he mentioned a string of names and pseudonyms that used to appear, twenty years previously, in reviews and newspapers of small circulation,

feeble paper flowers whose mental perfume had passed unnoticed by the whole world. Mosco pronounced those names with a certain unction, half admiration for the glory and half pride at having personally known the men who bore them, and he looked astonished when Maltrana very frankly declared that he did not know them. No wonder he suspected that journalism was in its decadence.

Mosco dwelt with admiration on the most rare qualities of those geniuses. He spoke eulogistically of one of them because he sang while he wrote and was never troubled by any noise, and never raised his head even if you fired a gun right at his ear. Another merited his praise because he always defied his creditors, and because, whenever the printer brought proofs to his house, he always found a new mistress there. Those were men! All without money, owing several editions at the press, chasing after the *peseta*, as did Cervantes "who had nothing for supper when he finished *Don Quixote*," happy as larks and making the typographers laugh with their jokes. But he worshipped most a grave and elegant gentleman, author of lengthy articles on international politics, who used to sit down in any old corner of the shop without getting stained, and who wrote with his gloves on.

"Just think of it, Isidro, without taking his gloves off! Are there any now who can do the same thing?"

His rustic mind considered this feat the greatest proof of talent, and he looked at his own hands, acknowledging himself incapable of such an exploit and declaring that he could not even catch a rabbit with his fists sheathed in leather.

Some Sundays, Mosco invited Maltrana to lunch, telling him that his brother, foreman in a newspaper agency, Señor Manolo, the Federal, a great personage among retailers of printed matter, would come from Madrid.

Maltrana knew him. He was famous in editorial rooms because of his tangled and picturesque language, as well as for his comments on political occurrences. With his wide priestly face, always bathed in perspiration, and his restless terrifying eyes, he appeared in the newspaper offices

to complain " as a business man " (those were his very words) of the delay of the management in the distribution of the paper, or " as a conscientious citizen " (also his own words) to demand, in the name of a committee of the district, the insertion of some manifest against the *unitarians*, who were as harmful to the nation as were the monarchists themselves.

Isidro, in spite of the fact that he was not enrolled in the party, became a friend of his. After all, Isidro was a likeable fellow, although not a " conscientious citizen."

" Whenever you feel like having a chat," he would tell him, " you know where my office is : Puerta del Sol, from five to eight in the morning, on the pavement in front of Borrell's drug store . . . whether it rains cats and dogs or not."

Neither rain nor snow managed to put his office out of commission. At break of day Señor Manolo arrived with his assistants loaded with newspapers. His speciality was the suburban sale. All the newsvendors, old women, children and ragged men, surrounded him yelling, thrusting out their hands to be the first. He was not perturbed in the least by the mob ; he was used to more critical situations in his " long political career."

" Order, citizens ! Let's have a few manners ! You will disgrace the fourth estate ! . . . Each will receive his supply according to strict parliamentary procedure and in accordance with his autonomous rights."

And with great calmness, he went on to distribute the bundles of newspapers, demanding from each vendor the product of the previous day's sale, working out in his mind the most complicated operations of book-keeping, checking the amounts received in coppers by weighing them in the palm of his hand, and sounding the *pesetas* against the pavement with such force that they rebounded into his hand as if they had been rubber balls.

" The fourth estate " was his favourite phrase. With it he wished to explain everything, but its meaning was often very hard to guess. Sometimes " the fourth estate " meant

the newsvendors alone ; at others, the people in general ; and, again, only those who bought newspapers.

Upon meeting him Maltrana invariably inquired after the famous " fourth estate."

" It is somewhat under the weather," replied Señor Manolo. " There is a storm brewing in the metallic atmosphere. The people don't want newspapers."

When he sold a new paper, he asserted emphatically : " To-day I have been extremely successful. The management ought to have passed me a vote of thanks, although they did not consult my opinion. I am common sense personified, and I would have moved and explained in a little speech that they should have issued the paper two hours later than they did. But, as I am not a literary man, they would have rejected my proposal, and that's the way the ' fourth estate ' is all going to pieces."

His enthusiasm for the Federalist cause highly amused Isidro, miserable *unitarian*, utterly incapable of understanding certain things. As far as Señor Manolo was concerned, Spain was divided into fourteen states, because his co-religionists had so decided in most solemn and free pacts. He was a citizen of New Castile, but he wished to live in peace and brotherhood with the foreigners of the other Spanish states, even if they belonged to the aristocratic " fourth estate."

" Do you come from Reus ? " he would ask one of his customers. " Very well, the Catalonian state has made a treaty with that of Castile. Let's go and have a drink, like good confederate citizens."

The Sunday meals at Mosco's were peaceful and placid. Feliciana, the hunter's daughter, served at the table or stood motionless near the wall, her eyes fixed on Maltrana. If the latter spoke, her admiring eyes seemed to drink in his very words, as if she were overawed by the young man's culture, which stood out in bold relief among his uneducated companions.

Isidro looked at her occasionally. How handsome was Mosco's daughter ! He found her prettier every time. He guessed her admiration for him, but those black eyes

fixed on him awakened in him only a vague feeling of gratitude. He never had thought of wasting time with a woman. That was good enough for well-to-do happy mortals.

Señor Manolo ate heartily, praising the tender flesh of the game from El Pardo. It smelt of thyme, rosemary and all the perfumes of the wood.

Sundays were for him days of rest and of placid isolation. He did not have any newspapers to sell ; only a few magazines to distribute at dawn to the ragged rabble that made him crazy. Yet, the worries of his profession troubled his leisure, and he interrupted the lunch to ask Mosco and Maltrana :

" I wonder where the *big fellows* are now ? . . ."

His two friends shrugged their shoulders, as if taking no interest in the matter. The *big fellows* were a group of clarion-throated vendors who had the ability to devise attractive cries to advertise their merchandise. They constituted the aristocracy of the trade and were exclusively employed in pushing new periodicals and selling books that had no readers, at enormously reduced prices. . . .

Señor Manolo, after considerable thought, informed his friends of the whereabouts of the fellows in question.

" They must be in Sarragossa, selling a new sheet which describes the latest crime, a thing that interests the " fourth estate " very much.'

When Isidro went to Mosco's house, he no longer stopped at his grandmother's. She had rented her house and had gone to live with Señor Polo, who had his hut on the summit of a hill from which one could see the whole of Madrid.

Señora Eusebia had finally decided to get " married " without the help of Church or State, to the comrade who had courted her since she had become a widow, and who, while waiting for her heart to soften, had contracted " matrimony " with several women of the neighbourhood.

The rag-pickers celebrated with great joy the union of those two *merchants*, who were by far the oldest in the business. What a pair of old carcasses ! Yet no one dared

carry into effect the serenade and practical jokes which some people had proposed for their benefit. They were worthy of respect; they were the most important merchants in the district and they had done perfectly well in merging their businesses into one company.

Maltrana and Señor Manolo, after hearing Mosco speak so much about his nocturnal expeditions, felt a strong desire to join him in one of them. But only one, eh? just enough to see what it was like. They did not want to take too big a chance of getting a bullet, just through mere curiosity. From time to time Mosco added certain details to his narrative which cooled down the enthusiasm of his hearers and made them postpone their expedition to a more auspicious occasion.

"Last night, at the Somontes barracks, Bonifa, a poor fellow who can't dodge anything, got a fearful dose of shot. . . . A week ago, at El Goloso, they caught Bastian and Paleto and gave them a leathering that nearly killed them; now they are in gaol at El Escorial. . . . At the barracks of Caños Quebrados, there is a blackguardedly keeper who fires first and then shouts: Halt! In Navachescas there is a brute who has already killed two poachers and, so they say, is dying to see me at the point of his gun."

Isidro and the newsvendor looked at each other knowingly. That settled it: they would postpone it. But suddenly, as if he wanted to amuse himself with their fears, Mosco became very insistent that they should accompany him, and the two friends, through *amour propre*, so that the hunter would not make fun of them, accepted his invitation.

On with the hunt. They surely would not be so unlucky as to meet the gamekeepers on the one night they were going to the woods when Mosco had been there for months and years without seeing them.

They agreed to meet the following evening at the tavern of Las Latas, and late in the afternoon Señor Manuel and Maltrana met each other at the crossway of Cuatro Caminos.

They wore their worst clothes—though neither of them knew exactly which were their best—with old caps drawn

over their eyes with the sly and mysterious air of conspirators fully conscious of their nefarious mission. The newspaper foreman acted as guide, for he was acquainted with the place of rendezvous. They abandoned the highway at Bellavista, walking along a deep road, through tile-roofed houses and garden walls along which ran the frothy murmuring waters of a canal.

Night was beginning to fall. The twilight sky was of a purple shade; the dark hills that closed the horizon displayed on a band of dull gold the black silhouette of the trees on their summits. A star shone with milky light through the soft twilight mist. The slow melancholy bells of invisible flocks tinkled; dogs barked in the gardens bordering the road; cart-wheels creaked in the distance; here and there, the windows of the rustic dwellings scattered through the ploughfields became lighted.

They met Mosco sitting on a stone near the inn.

"Stick around there," he said in a low voice. "Go into the inn for a drink and don't speak to me until I call you."

The two friends sat down under a pergola at the door of the inn—a low-roofed hut, full of smoke, with no breathing orifices other than the door and two very small windows. It was built of old cans, in place of bricks; the roof was made of kerosene cans reddened and rusted by the rain. Some worm-eaten boards against the wall served as benches. The inn of Las Latas was the meeting place of poachers before they set out.

It grew dark. In the feeble light, Maltrana saw the hunters arrive. He could recognize them through Mosco's descriptions. Each couple of men formed an *organization;* comrades in life and death, who never abandoned each other in the hour of danger and who, whenever they had to flee in different directions, instinctively knew where to meet again, to divide the bag with fraternal equality.

They were husky youths, who had all the appearances of being workers at the tile kilns. In spite of the cold, they were lightly clothed and carried no blankets; some carried their caps in their sashes, as if they were starting on a long walk and had to sweat a good deal in the course of the night.

Some of the *organizations* were reinforced by a lad loaded with a *needle*, a heavy iron bar, pointed at one end and with a ring at the other. These apprentice poachers carried the bar hanging from their shoulders by means of a rope, as if it were a gun, and they strutted through the groups full of pride, bursting with satisfaction at sharing in the dangers and adventures of the men.

Each *organization* arrived with a pack of dogs. After sniffing Maltrana and his friend, for the dogs instinctively knew them to be strangers, they gathered on a bridge which formed the starting point of the road their masters were to follow. There were dogs of all breeds, shapes and colours ; shapely built and well fed, filthy with long woolly hair, but all remained silent. Not a bark out of them, not a growl ; they stood grave and motionless, like soldiers who have a premonition of the impending battle.

Their masters spoke to each other in low voice, a habit acquired through the need of caution while they were in forbidden ground. Their words reached Maltrana like a soft murmur. They greeted one another ; some had not met for a long time and made mutual inquiries. One spoke of his brother ; he had received a letter from him that very morning ; he was at the San Miguel gaol, at Valencia ; he had a few months to serve before finishing the sentence imposed upon him for poaching in the royal preserves. Another surrounded by some of his companions, opened his shirt and exhibited his chest. There was hardly any trace on it of the dose of shot they had given him. That was his first outing after a couple of weeks enforced rest.

They spoke of their companions in the gaol at El Escorial, discussing what penalty each might receive. One had bidden them farewell ; they would not see him for a long time ; the following day he would go to Madrid, to the Modelo Gaol, to spend his sentence of some eight months.

And all, forgetting for a moment the hunt, spoke of the good times to come, of the Spring when the kilns would open up again and they would get good wages making tiles. They talked about their trade. In Villalba they paid better per thousand than in Madrid. Some of them had already

asked for a job, and wanted to set off as soon as the good weather came. . . . But their dogs, sniffing their hands and rubbing themselves against their legs, impatient to make a start, brought them back to the present, and they began their lamentations. What a life, gentlemen! The worst time of the year: breeding time. The rabbits were thin and scabby. All one could get was young rabbits, and for a bundle of them one *peseta* was the highest ever paid. Besides, bad nights were plentiful, wretched nights when the game seemed to hide in the very bosom of the earth and the ferret went into the burrows without meeting anything that wore fur. The result was that they risked their freedom and their lives, and at the end of the month all they had earned was the equivalent of six *reales* per day. And yet the bloodthirsty keepers, who had a good salary, persecuted them ruthlessly! . . . The mounted keepers came in for their most violent curses. They spoke with awe of the horse of one of the keepers—an infernal beast with more intelligence and worse intentions than a man—a monster who, when running after a poacher, bit him, knocked him down under his feet and kicked him, until his rider, getting off, helped the fellow, so that he might reach the gaol alive. Ah, the ugly beast! Better, by far, to get a dose of lead than to meet him. . . .

Some *organizations*, after bidding their friends good-bye, in a low voice, started on their way, preceded by their dogs, and were lost in the darkness.

"Good-bye," answered the others in mysterious tones. "Hope you'll have a good night."

They were the first to set off because they were going very far, to the remotest corners of the royal preserves: Goloso, San Jorge and Valdelaganar, near Viñuelas.

Those who still remained on the little bridge advised each other as to the spots where they intended to spend the night. Some were going to Valdepalomero, La Portillera, Querá; others intended to ford the Manzanares and daringly hunt on the other side of El Pardo: La Atalaya, Los Torneos, Valdelapeña, Trofas and La Zarzuela, all places frequented by the royal hunters themselves.

The black mass that obstructed the bridge was gradually dwindling away.

The *organizations* moved on, casting a black shadow on the white road. For a moment, they appeared on the summit of a hill, diminished by the distance, and then vanished.

Mosco approached the inn.

" I'm ready for you. . . ."

In a little bag hanging from his neck he carried his treasure, the ferret which rolled itself into a ball in its linen cage, seeking the warmth of his chest. Near him was his assistant, who completed the *organization*. He was a small, smart lad, agile as a monkey, surnamed Chispas, who never gave the tile kilns a thought, but, on the contrary, admiring his master, wished to hunt all the year round.

On his shoulder Chispas carried the heavy *needle* that was used to demolish the burrows and open a path to the ferret when the little animal had lost its subterraneous way and could not come back to the surface, and inside his sash, the *capillos* or nets that were spread over the mouths of the burrows to catch the rabbits.

They started on their way, following the direction the other poachers had taken. Mosco walked in front, preceded by two of his dogs, and Chispas brought up the rear.

" You may speak and smoke as you please. We are still in safe ground. . . . I'll tell you when you need to have an eye as sharp as a lynx's."

The two neophytes followed on the quick footsteps of Mosco, who kept on talking continuously. He had remained away from the inn so that nobody would suspect that he had company in his expedition. He was afraid somebody would get wind of it and carry the tale. As far as he was concerned, it did not matter in the least ; the keepers knew that he hunted every night, no matter what happened. The worse the night, the better for him. But if they saw him with the encumbrance of two friends, without freedom to flee, they might take advantage of the occasion and try to capture him. For he was utterly incapable of running away, going as he was with two persons who did

not know the ground; he would rather be torn to pieces than play such a dirty trick.

"It is crazy," he continued, "to attempt this kind of work with greenhorns like you. But this night's business is not going to be anything serious; merely a look around. We'll get close enough to search a few burrows, just to show you what kind of a business this is. . . . How happy will the deer be to-night when they find out that Mosco won't have anything to do with them! . . ."

He asked them if they had had a good meal before they started. In the wood, they would find only some brook where they could get a mouthful of water, but they should avoid this, for the streams were closely watched by the keepers. On their return to Carolinas they would have a *cachuela*, the favourite dish of the hunters, that had a glorious taste: a stew of fresh rabbit entrails.

When Maltrana and Señor Manolo heard that the famous poacher had no intention of risking anything that night, they became more at ease. Their hearts had sunk into their boots when they had heard the hunters speak of wounds, thrashings and gaols as the natural accidents of their trade.

"Are you sure that we won't meet the keepers?" asked Señor Manolo of his brother.

"Man, I don't think we'll meet them, but I can't be sure of it. You know . . . anything might happen."

A prolonged silence followed these disturbing words. Mosco continued to speak so as to draw his friends' attention from the fatigue of the march. He described the grandeur of El Pardo; nobody knew it as well as he. In some spots, not all the keepers together, on foot and on horseback, could find him. Fourteen leagues of land were preserved by the kings for their hunts. And this without counting the Casa de Campo, the Granja, the estate of Aranjuez and others that he did not remember. . . . And let everybody else rot!

Mosco's words dispelled Señor Manolo's uneasiness, and gliding down from the heights of his ideal federalism to the practical application of what he called "the programme."

"The day," he said, "in which the state of Castile shall

become autonomous, this scandal will come to an end. We will start some farms on the banks of the Manzanares and, believe me, those of Valencia and Murcia will look like pig-sties by comparison. We'll cut down the trees, so that our colleagues of the 'fourth estate' may warm themselves in winter; we'll plough up the land, so that it will grow wheat, and hurrah for cheap bread! . . . Fourteen leagues for the amusement of one single man, when the 'fourth estate' has but seven feet of land in the cemetery! . . . Why, that piece of land is almost as big as one province in the unitarian republic! . . ."

Maltrana watched the dogs that marched in their van; they went along silently, their necks outstretched and their ears thrust forward, sniffing the dark horizon without a grunt, and without paying any attention to their fellows, who barked in the neighbouring farms.

They had walked for over an hour and still they could not see the walls of El Pardo. Mosco noticed that his friends panted, that they felt fatigued when climbing the dark hills, and the loose stones rolled down under their feet.

"Courage!" he exclaimed. "I was expecting this; you are city men and not accustomed to walking. My goodness, this is a mere stroll."

They crossed the sandy beds of two streams that were dry at that season. When they stopped awhile on a sumiit, Maltrana turned his head around and saw, floating at his back over the black hills, a red veil, the flare of a distant conflagration that coloured most of the horizon. It was the luminous vapour of the hidden city of Madrid. Nearer at hand, scattered along the irregular line of the horizon, were clusters of lights or rosaries of isolated flames, as if the earth had been an asphalt lake sombrely reflecting the stars.

Mosco extended his arm with the assurance of a man intimately acquainted with the nocturnal landscape. The lights closer at hand were those of Bellavistas and Carolinas; the others, those of Chamartin and Tetuan. Pointing out some feeble reflections, scarcely visible in front of them, he named other towns: Aravaca and Pozuelo de Alcorcon;

and far, far away, where only his owlish eyes could reach, the lights of El Escorial.

Descending the height, they came to a wide stream. Mosco crouched down and took Maltrana on his back in spite of the latter's efforts to the contrary. It was a custom of the poachers to ford a stream with their companions on their backs. On the return journey, the poacher who had crossed the stream on his friend's back, returned the compliment, and thus each got wet only once in the two trips. Only those who were sick or convalescent were exempted from this reciprocity. Mosco considered his feeble friends, fatigued as they were with the march, as sick.

On the other side of the stream, Isidro and Señor Manuel saw that the road ran between two tall hedges of thorny plants. Mosco ordered them to throw their cigars away; they could not smoke any more until they returned; they were in the enemy's country. That spot was called Mal Paso. Many a time the keepers of El Pardo, leaving their own jurisdiction, lay in ambush there to surprise the poachers on their return home. His friend Garrucho had been shot in that same spot one night when they were coming home loaded with a couple of deer. His poor friend, after recovering from his wound, had been sent to Alcala Gaol, for stealing larger game. Mosco had taken to his heels without letting go his load.

"An injustice!" he exclaimed, "a scandal. . . . This land is not theirs; here they are ordinary citizens, like you or I. But they belong to the *big house*, and there is no tribunal or potentate who will not side with them."

They walked for another good hour, but without following any path, through fields of loose earth interspersed with stones on which they stumbled. When crossing a vineyard, Isidro bumped into the trunk of an old vine and hurt one of his legs. But, where the deuce were the woods of El Pardo, that seemed to run away and plunge into the shadows? . . .

"Courage," said Mosco in a low voice. "We are quite near; I can see the walls already."

But Señor Manolo and his friend could not see a thing.

With his sore leg, not caring whether he got any more bumps or not, as if nothing worse could happen to him, Isidro went along with his eyes fixed on Venus that shone in the horizon. When they went up a hill, the planet ascended the heavens; if they went down, it sank until it barely touched the top of the hill ahead. Seemingly it played with them, attracting them only to run away from hilltop to hilltop.

At last the two neophytes found themselves at the foot of the walls of El Pardo. Maltrana observed their height with astonishment. Those were not ordinary walls; they were the very walls of China. And would he have to jump them? He would prefer to remain at their foot, resting. He would lie down on the ground and wait for Mosco's return even if he did not come back till dawn.

"Shhh!" whispered the hunter, to make them speak lower. "You shall climb them; I'll see to that myself."

Maltrana's protest was the last resistance of fear, a refusal of instinct before that sombre wall behind which lay the unlawful, the forbidden and the threat of the gamekeeper with his ruthless gun.

Mosco and his assailant were silently preparing for the assault, speaking without making the least sound, moving about noiselessly. To Maltrana they seemed like phantoms. . . . Up! Chispas placed his foot on his master's hands, clutched at the wall and in a moment he was riding atop it.

Come on, then; the dogs! The animals knew their duty perfectly; they allowed themselves to be lifted by Mosco, and pushed by him, they climbed the wall, balanced themselves for a moment on the edge, their bellies flattened against the top, and let themselves down on the other side with no noise other than the almost imperceptible rustling of dry leaves.

Maltrana felt himself grabbed by the legs and hoisted, at the same time that Chispas, leaning over, seized him by the arms. The poachers laughed at his light weight. For a moment he sat horseback fashion on top of the wall,

dizzy with the climb, sore of body through contact with the protruding bricks.

Mosco greeted him from below with a joke that made his hair stand on end.

" What an excellent target ! What a fine shot the keepers are missing ! "

Isidro had no strength to protest. There was an opportune joke for you ! And submissive through sheer necessity being entirely in the hands of his coarse friends, he had to descend to the other side helped by Chispas, who had preceded him and was supporting him by the legs. Señor Manolo, more agile than Isidro, scaled the wall with no great effort, and, a little while after, Mosco joined them.

There they were in the mouse-trap. Isidro thought with terror how utterly impossible it would be to climb the wall again if they were pursued by the keepers. But this impression of fear almost vanished when he saw what surrounded them.

His astonishment made him believe for a moment that they were in a new world. The jumping of the wall was like the passage from one planet to another. He forgot the stony hills, the barren banks, with more stones than plants, the whole arid countryside sunk in the darkness on the other side of the wall, uniform and flat like a black pool.

Before his eyes was the immense wood, beautified by the diffused light of the stars that softened in the semi-darkness the asperities of its wild vegetation, harmonizing its untamed colours with the phantastic vagueness of an immense enchanted garden. Maltrana thought he was seeing a gigantic drawing in black and white, on a blue background perforated by innumerable pin-pricks which allowed the light to shine through.

The forest, sleeping under the brilliancy of the stars, seemed like the garden of a legend. Maltrana thought of Wagner and his valorous Siegfried, of the hero's rustic flute that made the birds talk. He even thought for a moment that from the denseness of the forest some dragon not known to the keepers might appear.

The thick brambles, encircled by crooked paths, seemed like trellises of centenarian rose-bushes. The earth was white, of the whiteness of milk; the trees formed vaults of black lattice work through the openings of which could be seen the winking eyes of the planets. On top of the hills, the lonely pine-trees projected on the blue background their umbrella-like tops, some erect and elegant, others leaning over, as if they wanted to lie down.

No flowers were to be seen in the fantastic garden, but Maltrana imagined them to be enormous, such as never blossomed on earth to the light of the sun. A resinous perfume floated in the air, like a sharp caress, so thick that one seemed to chew it with each breath. It was an essence for the nostrils of a giant. From the stillness of the forest came cries of birds, mocking greetings to the bipeds who advanced silently close to the bushes, so as not to project their silhouettes on the patches of white earth; hurried runs that betrayed the startled awakening of the rabbits, scared by the cautious footsteps of the party.

Maltrana doubted the reality. He must be dreaming; that world could not exist. He would assuredly wake up from one moment to another and find himself in the wretched bed in Artistas Street.

The beings that surrounded him were not real. Those dogs that walked making the least noise, without breathing, turning their heads towards their master, as if they wanted to bark at him with their eyes, were the dogs of a dream. To a dream also belonged the two hunters who walked or crouched down like shadows, speaking to each other without moving their lips, understanding each other by signs; even the newspaper foreman was the figure of a dream, his eyes sticking out and his mouth gaping, leaning forward as he walked, his stomach contracted through the influence of fear. Maltrana's footsteps alone sounded as they crunched the sand, and this noise seemed so big, so gigantic in the silence of the forest that it must awaken the keepers at a distance of several leagues.

Now and then the forest became agitated by a noisy undulation. A gust of wind shaking the branch of a tree

gave the signal. All the trees shook, their tops bending down. The elms, the pines, the oaks, the birches shook their heads ; the immense orchestra of the wood vibrated, and from one end to the other spread the lament of the wild symphony, awaking echoes in the glens, becoming sharper in the heights and descending again in search of new masses of trees that would repeat the sigh, as a quivering harp.

At first Isidro searched for the wall with his eyes, as if its proximity was a hope of salvation, but now he walked boldly on, though his legs trembled, his fear entirely obliterated by the majesty of silence. In the midst of such peacefulness it was impossible for men to kill their fellows.

Mosco, who knew all the burrows in El Pardo, stopped close to an oak. Certain burrows were there that undoubtedly hid something. His brother and Maltrana crouched down at his bidding. The dogs turned silently round and round, as if they scented the game hidden in the bowels of the earth. Chispas knelt some distance away. The outlets of the burrows were located there ; and he placed the nets over them. Mosco opened the bag and took out the ferret. The beast carried at its neck a little bell of feeble timbre, and on one of its legs a string by means of which they pulled it out of the burrows.

The feeble tinkle of the bell was soon lost underground. Señor Manolo followed the operation with great interest, standing on all fours close to his brother. Maltrana, lying on his back, looked at the stars and at the dark blue sky frosted with luminous power. He had dared a great danger in order to see the unlawful hunt, and now he took no interest in it. He preferred to remain motionless, in sweet silence, sore with fatigue, caressed by the peacefulness that seemed to descend from the sky. He felt there as if the forest belonged to him. Why should the keepers appear ? The beauty of the night dispelled his fears, removed from his mind all possibility of danger.

Chispas gave a grunt of satisfaction, then another . . . and another. " Three . . . four . . . five : the beast was working like a clock." He kept gathering them as fast as they fell into the net ; some were untouched, but others

were badly wounded by the ferret and were streaming with blood. Those that were unharmed were promptly killed by the lad, who choked them with his own fingers. He handed over each piece to Señor Manolo, and the latter passed them on to Maltrana, that he could feel them, laughing with the brutal pleasure of destruction. They were still warm ; what a mess the beast made of them when it bit them ! . . .

Chispas announced that there were no more ; the burrow had been depopulated. Mosco pulled the string and the dull tinkling of the bell was heard again. The beast was all excited, drunk with blood. The hunter let out a muffled curse before he returned it to the bag ; it had sunk its sharp teeth into one of his fingers.

Isidro reluctantly abandoned his bed of dry leaves to follow the *organization* in search of new burrows. Why did they not go back ? They had already seen how the trick was done. But Mosco protested.

" Go back ? . . . Damnation ! I should say not. The night has begun rather well."

For about two hours they walked through the glens, looking for those spots the hunter knew were plentiful in burrows. There was not a rabbit's home he did not have catalogued in his memory.

Isidro took advantage of every halt in the search to stretch himself on the dry leaves and look at the sky. The planet he had seen when coming along the road no longer shone in the horizon ; it had hidden itself, and new stars invaded the sky. Really, the destruction Señor Manolo had in mind should the autonomous Castilian state triumph, the cutting down of the forest in order to plough the land might be a very revolutionary reform, but things were better as they were, the forest was infinitely more beautiful, even if the public weal had to suffer considerably.

An alarm signal from the dogs brought Isidro out of his musings. They advanced cautiously, stopped, turned round to look at their master. Their tails rose with a motion that indicated their indecision ; their ears were anxiously thrust forward.

"Shhh! shhh!" murmured Mosco to his companions, to make them stand still in the thicket.

They were all kneeling down, leaning on their hands, thrusting their heads forward, like the dogs, in order to hear better. The foreman opened his mouth, as if his heart would jump out of it, shrivelled with fear. Maltrana felt his blood beating at his temples.

One of the dogs growled and Mosco seemed to reassure himself. Somebody was near, but not an enemy. The dogs announced with silent movements the proximity of the keepers. When they ventured to growl, it was because they scented friendly people.

The hunter, standing up, slapped one of his thighs several times. As if reproduced by the echo, similar blows immediately resounded on the other side of the thicket. He then raised the back of one of his hands to his mouth and a feeble whistle, like that of a bird, rent the silence. Another invisible bird answered him.

"Let's keep on; they are friends," said Mosco.

There was a crackling of branches and two men bending forward issued from the thicket. The dogs of the *organization* rubbed themselves for a moment against those that had come out from the brush. The men passed close by Mosco.

"What have you caught?" he asked.

"Nothing yet; only two young rabbits."

"I wish you luck."

The *organization* disappeared with its dogs and Mosco moved on, promising his friends, who had hardly recovered from their fright, that he would wind up the expedition as soon as he had visited some burrows—the best in El Pardo—located close by a brook.

They stopped for a moment in the jungle, listening to an invisible stream as it fell over some rocks a short distance away.

Maltrana paid no attention to the hunt; he wished the expedition would end as soon as possible. He was seized with pity and repugnance at the little bodies of soft fur that Señor Manolo was gathering up at the same time that he praised the weight of their palpitating flesh.

Lying down on a slope, his arms crossed under his head, he suddenly saw rising above the thicket, in front of him, two crosses of several arms, coarse, rough, as if fashioned with an axe. A black snout, varnished by dampness, jutted out from the thicket ; a pair of lachrymose shining eyes looked at him for a moment. Influenced by fear, Maltrana thought he saw a horrible monster, a creature worthy of the enchanted forest, something like the dragon of the legend he had heard when he was but a little tot. Terror made him stand up with a nervous jump. A fiendish snort shook the jungle. The crosses disappeared and the brush crackled as it gave way before the mad race.

Mosco ran to the spot, cursing and swearing.

" Damnation ! . . . And to think that I haven't brought my gun ! They seem to know it and they make fun of us ! . . ."

The dogs, after attempting to give chase, turned to their master's side when they saw that he stood still.

The meeting with the deer took away from Mosco all wish to continue the hunt any further.

" Let's go ! We are not doing a damned thing here ! "

They started their retreat, going straight for the wall. Jumping over, helped by his friends, Isidro found himself again in the barren black fields sprinkled in the distance with lights. Again he thought he had been dreaming and that the rustling trees and the fantastic garden had existed only in his imagination.

The heavy bunches of dead animals that Señor Mano.o carried in his hands were the only witnesses to the reality of their adventure.

" Feel, Isidro," said the foreman, laughing. " What a fine *cachuela* we are going to eat ! "

The young man, thinking of the keepers, felt a greater fear than he had experienced on the other side of the walls. It seemed impossible to him that he should have been in that rat-trap, calmly lying down in the jungle, admiring the stars. He certainly had run a great risk of getting shot ! . . .

Mosco examined the position of the stars.

" It is two 'oclock ; we'll be home before dawn."

Again they crossed on the backs of the poachers the stream close to Mal Paso. Chispas and his master walked light of foot, without the least indication of fatigue, but highly discontented with the night's work. They had wasted the night ; only eighteen rabbits, that was all. The fatigue, the worries and the frights that still made Maltrana and the foreman tremble, were for the hunters incidents of no importance in the daily struggle. . . . what a funny way of earning your livelihood !

As they stopped for a moment on top of a hill, Maltrana saw again the red cloud that hovered over Madrid, and the luminous rosaries that formed the lighting system of the different towns.

The great city rested wrapped up in a discreet light, while in its gloomy surroundings the adventurers of life went about fearless of all danger.

As he contemplated the distant city Maltrana thought he saw in it a symbol of modern life, of the implacable and ruthless social inequality.

The happy ones, those who had their wants more than satisfied, slept quietly in the warmth of a civilization, the advantages of which they had monopolized. The caravan of happy ones did not wish to go any further, thinking they had seen enough. They slept around the bonfire, caressed by its tepid breath, with the voluptuous lethargy caused by a heavy digestion. And beyond the red circle of flames, in the wall of trembling shadows, behind which lay the unknown, wrathful eyes shone, the grating of claws that are being sharpened sounded, and a growl went forth from the hungry beasts, blinded by so much light. The wanderers of the social desert, the deserters from the caravan, the pariahs, the beasts, the abortions of the night, prowled around the bivouac, not daring to leave their shadowy circle, afraid to risk the light.

They were blinded by the fire ; a cold shiver ran through them at sight of the shining weapons lying close to the sleepers. They threatened, they roared, but the happy ones,

sunk in sweet slumber, could not hear their threats or their roars.

Maltrana thought that some day the bonfire would gradually die down for lack of new fuel ; and when nothing but red embers was left and the voracious shadows invaded the circle of light, then the great fight would come, the struggle in the dark, the overpowering push of the multitude, the assault of the creatures of the night to seize the riches of the happy ones, the booty represented by the comfort they have monopolized, the weapons that constitute their most precious right.

CHAPTER IV

IN the afternoon of the second day of the Carnival, as Maltrana walked along the Artistas Street and reached Cuatro Caminos, he stopped for a moment, wondering whether he should go down to Madrid or up to Bellavistas and Carolinas.

He heartily disliked the Carnival of Madrid, coarse and monotonous, whose only attractions were those of being elbowed or trampled upon by the multitude. He therefore decided to go and see his friend Mosco, at the same time visiting his grandmother in her new home, also that of Zarathustra. According to what Polo had told him the last time they met at the octroi office, the poor old woman wanted to see him. He would not lose anything by keeping on good terms with his grandmother. In the Carolinas they still spoke of treasure and who knows but she might make him her sole heir !

Isidro laughed at the avarice that was awakening in him. He felt happy in spite of the fact that he had not earned any money for some time. Taking advantage of the faith his stepfather had in him, for he always paid any arrears for his share of the rent of his room, Maltrana had borrowed a couple of *pesetas* from him.

That afternoon he was nursing the hope that he might lunch at Mosco's house, for he was perfectly certain he would not dine when he went down to Madrid in the evening.

In his poverty he was buoyed up by the assurance of youth, which always hopes for the unexpected and firmly believes that the whole universe is interested in it and ready to deviate the course of events in order to pull it out of difficult situations.

In his optimism, Isidro had the presentiment of a great fortune. Therefore he put up a bold front to the buffetings of Fate ; it would finally surrender to him.

Two days previous, as he was walking along Alcala Street, opposite the Treasury building, he had met Don Gaspar Jimenez, first marquis of Jimenez, senator of the realm, and a relative of the lady who had befriended him in his more prosperous period. He had met the solemn personage several times without attracting any attention. Don Gaspar knew Isidro, but he went by without taking any notice of him. The senator probably was aware of his wandering existence, of his decision not to be a man of importance, of his bohemian life that had cut short his studies at the university. The senator was a stern man. " Life is not a joke," he had told him when he flung him out of his benefactress's house.

For all these reasons, Maltrana was dumb with astonishment when he saw that the senator, dressed in a spotless frock coat and tall hat, with the grave and weighty appearance of one of the rulers of the country, instead of looking at the other side of the street, fixed his eyes on him, favouring him with a kindly smile.

The senator, leaving two other gentlemen of equally awe-inspiring aspect who were walking with him, came up to Maltrana and placed his protecting hand on his shoulder.

" How are you, young man ? . . . How are things with you ? . . ."

The terrible Maltrana, who at the meetings with other youths let loose all his bile on everything that existed, describing the country as a pen full of beasts where one could not find even half a man, softened and was moved by the least show of consideration from a potentate.

The senator's slap and smile upset him so much that he stammered. He thought, one needs to be acquainted with a person for a long time before one really knows that person. The senator had been, to him, a despicable bourgeois, an empty pedant. . . . That is the trouble in judging a man at a distance. Now that he stood in front of Isidro, after several years, the latter found him suddenly amiable, with

a certain air of a thinker, of a great economist, one of those who hold in their hands the key of the national pantry. There was no need for exaggeration ; men do not rise without some reason, and when that gentleman occupied the position he did, it was because there was something in him.

" Didn't you take your degree ? " the senator asked. " Well, you did the right thing, if your inclinations take you along other paths. You are an artist : you were born to be a writer."

And to Maltrana's great astonishment, he spoke to him of the articles he had published. He had not read them ; he did not have time to do many things he would like to accomplish, but people had praised them to him very highly. They were *deep* literature, the kind he liked : learned and conscientious studies. He loved anything serious, conscientious. . . . Maltrana felt transfigured, ready to rise from the ground like a balloon, swollen with the happiness of hearing someone praising his articles and with the knowledge that that " someone " was a gentleman who might become a Secretary of State any day.

" Come and see me when you have time, without any ceremony ; you know that we are old friends ; I consider you as one of my family. . . . I think it would be to your advantage that we should meet each other ; something good is bound to come out of our interview."

Maltrana, eager with hope after these words, wished to see the senator the following day. But the latter wanted to spend the Carnival in an estate of his, at Medina del Campo, far from the hubbub of the city, as befitted a serious person. After the holidays, he would be glad to see him at his house any morning.

And he went away, escorted by his solemn companions, after having shaken Maltrana's hand with the cordiality he exhibited toward his colleagues. Maltrana followed him with his eyes which shone with intense love. Something good was bound to come out of his unexpected friendship with the personage. . . . And the remembrance of the marquis, like a promise of good luck, accompanied him during the days of the Carnival.

At Bellavistas, Maltrana came upon a living reproduction of one of Goya's pictures. Several unkempt wenches—rag-pickers all—were tossing a dummy man in a blanket, a suit of clothes stuffed with straw and full of tumours, a pair of dilapidated shoes and a head made of cardboard. A group of lads tried to snatch the dummy away and carry it prisoner to the tavern, but the dishevelled girls defended it with deft blows from some brooms with which they were armed. The motley company merrily ran through the fields, and in the excitement of the struggle, some of the girls fell to the ground with such force that they exposed their not overclean legs.

Maltrana, with his threadbare overcoat and hat of a gentleman in straitened circumstances, seemed to interrupt the struggle in which the rough youths were indulging. The girls, taking each other by the arm, walked behind him, singing with insolent intonation :

There he goes ! There he goes !
The guy with the overcoat !

The lads laughed at the joke and were ready to support it with a volley of stones, should the gentleman be guilty of bad taste in resenting the pleasantry.

Maltrana left the hostile company behind him and walked into a field. He wanted to call at Zarathustra's hut before going to Carolinas.

The hut was situated on the summit of a small hill from which a view of all Madrid could be enjoyed. At a distance Zarathustra's dwelling looked like a heap of rubbish and ruins. It consisted of three separate bodies, but they were so low, so sunken in the hollowness of the earth that their roofs rose scarcely above the top of the hill. Zarathustra's cart seemed larger than the building ; it could be seen far better than the latter, standing out against the sky with one end in the ground, its shafts up in the air, and the girths for the mule joining them and giving them the appearance of gallows.

The young man guessed he was near the hut when he saw a pack of dogs coming towards him. They were Zara-

thustra's companions—of all sizes and breeds, all dirty, with yellowish eyes and a poisonous saliva drivelling through their teeth ; semi-savage animals that saw no other human beings except a beggar from time to time and felt ferociously inclined towards Maltrana, irritated by his urbane appearance.

They did not bark, but approached Maltrana silently, gnashing their teeth with the avowed intention of biting him, stretching their claws towards his trousers. The young man seized a stone and began to shout with all his might for Zarathustra and Señora Eusebia.

A whistle, and the feeble voice of Señor Polo calling his dogs came from behind the hut. Isidro was able to proceed, escorted by the ferocious pack that turned around him sniffing at his clothes.

He passed between the cart and a low wall, entering a small yard in front of which were the fields, with Madrid in the background, and on one side the dark hills of Casa de Campo. The other sides of the yard were enclosed by three huts that constituted the abode and dependencies of the great Zarathustra. The latter was sitting on an upturned tub, sewing with twine several pieces of old carpet that had served as a covering for the mule.

" Excuse me for not rising," he said in his childish voice. " You are one of the family. Ah ! My legs ! . . ."

He had exchanged his cloak of rabbit skins for the one reserved for great solemnities, the one with the tinsel and the ribbons that gave him the appearance of a theatrical savage. It was a remnant of his former sprightliness, a souvenir of those years when he used to go down to the heart of Madrid, during the Carnival, dressed in his most showy rags, accepting the astonishment and the jests of the multitudes as testimonials of admiration. He had kept up the habit of bedecking himself with savage ornaments when the festival arrived, but he stayed at home, vanquished by the senile rheumatism which paralysed his legs.

Curiously Maltrana surveyed Zarathustra's home, enlarged by new buildings since the last time he had seen it. The old man's energy, his rare talent of taking advantage

of the débris, kept him continuously altering his house. The rag-picker smiled at the young man's astonishment.

"What do you think of it? . . . This place has grown considerably; this is the royal palace of Tetuan. There are gentlemen from Madrid who make the trip just to see it; artists, most of them. This building is the store." He pointed to the hut at the door of which he was sitting. "That one in front of us is the kitchen and stable. It communicates with the main building, the old homestead, where your grandmother and I live."

Maltrana felt a strong desire to laugh at the majestic way in which Polo spoke of his dwelling, pointing out its component parts. He had built it all, with the help of his servant, and had made it as solid as a rock.

The three huts had all the appearance of as many heaps of rubbish and débris in which a family of moles had opened a few holes, by way of doors, and had drilled crooked galleries that served as rooms. All the spoils of the city had been employed in the buildings. Only here and there a few bricks and some broken stones from torn-down buildings could be seen; the remainder was composed of the most heterogeneous materials—cans, kerosene receptacles, coffee-pots, chamber-pots, shoe lasts, all mixed up with broken china vases, small alabaster columns, pieces of statues, all in haphazard fashion, thrown in as it came from the daily search in Madrid and stuck in the mortar by way of bricks.

Maltrana noticed a sharp oxidated point sticking from the wall above Zarathustra's head. Examining it closely, he found that it was a syringe. Further on, two glazed tiles of golden reflections shone, and next to them protruded a bronze-coloured feminine arm that had, no doubt, supported a gas lamp in some café or other.

Several galvanized bottomless pails, stuck in the wall like the port-holes in a steamer's cabin, did duty as windows. The roofs were made of straw, branches of trees and old pieces of tarpaulin, forming a covering of extraordinary thickness that the most persistent rain could not penetrate. The cracks were caulked with papers and rags. The roof

of the kitchen was capped with a broken tub that served as chimney.

The storehouse exhaled a stench of dust, putrescent bones and rotten clothes, together with that undefinable odour of old houses that have been shut up for a long time. A buzzing of pestiferous flies vibrated in the dark interiors of the huts. Now and then a bluebottle flew near Isidro, gloomy, poisonous, with metallic reflections and disgustingly swollen, as if it had been gorging itself upon a grave.

Maltrana inquired after his grandmother.

" I am all alone. I have sent Bobo to Madrid to see the masqueraders, and the old woman is at the Doctrine, in that big shed at Bellavistas where the ladies of the city gather the feminine flock of rag-pickers to make them sing prayers."

Zarathustra, who boasted of knowing everybody in Madrid, had heard people talk of some of those devout ladies when they were young, and he laughed, winking his lachrymose eyes. The devil, fed up with flesh, had become preacher ! . . . They presented the rag-pickers with one sheet per year and with rice and chestnuts at Christmas ; but they made them attend the exposition of the Doctrine twice a week. During Carnival, a great gathering to beg the Lord to forgive the crazy world marked the beginning of the wearisome period of Lent. Those who did not attend the great ceremonies did not get the sheet.

" I'm telling you, Isidro, they earn it all right, and when they go to get the sheets from those ladies, their knees are as horny as an elephant's. The poor, when urged by want, stick at nothing ; but you should see the womenfolks hereabouts coming out from the Doctrine very piously, as if they were all saints, and as soon as they are out of sight of those ladies. . . . The least they say is that they are professionals. . . . People like to get things for nothing. There's your grandmother, for instance, who is thinking about that sheet all the year round. But can you tell me what the dickens she wants the sheet for, a woman like her who is so rich, as everybody knows ? Women, Isidro, women are a bad lot ! . . . Your grandmother has seen

me in some very tight corners ; I had to pay the rent of the fields I work, right there in front of us, for you must know that before a rag-picker, I am a farmer. I didn't have a red cent, but she didn't help me out, and refused to tell me where she keeps her treasure. And mind you, that in spite of the fact that I didn't spare the rod. That's the only way to deal with females : a loaf of bread in one hand and a thick stick in the other. . . . I know them, you bet I know them ! . . . And I should know them too, for I've had five of them ! . . . When they are young they are always gallivanting, thinking of nothing but having a good time and giving lip to their men ; when they grow old they become drunkards, and so tight with their money that they don't care a rap if their men have to go about stark naked."

Zarathustra remained silent, looking at Madrid, which, with its big mass of roofs and spires, closed the horizon. The sky, without the least trace of humidity—a truly Castilian sky, ardent and dry, of a limpidity that sharpened the outline of things—seemed to bring the distant city nearer.

The rag-picker thought he could see with his bleary eyes the whole of humanity who at that very hour were running and shouting in the cells and galleries of the enormous hive, sheltered under the covering of tiles. His voice assumed a solemn accent, as was usual when he wished to say something of a transcendental nature.

" Woman, Isidro, is inferior to man and unworthy of him. Pay attention to this and remember it always ; you may as well profit from the friendship of a wise man like myself, who has seen a lot and knows life thoroughly. Woman is an animal of few brains ; vain as a turkey-cock, stupid as a magpie on a stone. Give her a good dress, a good tight-fitting shoe, and all the rest that goes to make a showy appearance, and she will be happy. Don't give her all the show and pomp she wants, and she will give her body to the devil. . . . Man is more dignified and noble ; he thinks of other things than clothes, and that is why he ought to command and to use the stick at the opportune moments, so that he may be respected. With his working togs on, he

often feels better than if he wore an overcoat and a tall hat. Look at me now ; I have good clothes ; I could dress myself every day as I am to-day, but I don't want to. On the other hand, there isn't a woman among the rag-pickers who, on finding a good skirt, doesn't put it on to excite the envy of the other females. The woman who is shabbily dressed, even if she be old and homely, does so because she can't help herself. The man who goes about like a scarecrow does so, not for lack of the wherewithal, but simply because he has his attention riveted on higher things, because he is a nobler and a more intelligent animal."

Thus spoke Zarathustra.

Maltrana, annoyed by the stench from the storehouse and by the buzzing of the flies, finally abandoned his seat—three pieces of cork nailed together in the shape of a bench. If his grandmother was not at home, he would go away.

The rag-picker stopped him. He would not advise him to wait for the old woman ; if they were going to pray for all the merry sins that were being committed that afternoon in Madrid, they would have to pray well into the night. But before Isidro should go away, he wanted to show him the house, especially the bedroom, which he had arranged at the time of his wedding. Women were fond of the little luxuries of good living, and he had endeavoured to have things so that Señora Eusebia, on leaving her house at Carolinas, should not come into a dwelling fit for Indians alone.

"We have got a little style here," said Zarathustra, laboriously rising, after sticking the needle on the pieces of carpet and folding them together.

Walking with his body bent down at the waist and his legs stiff and wide open, he preceded Maltrana through a gloomy passage, low of roof and so narrow that their elbows rubbed against the curious objects stuck in the walls. The feeble light that passed through a pickle-can used as a skylight, shed its yellowish rays at the end of the passage, where a swarm of flies were dancing in the air.

On one side, a semicircular opening was used as a stable. The walls were made of worm-eaten wood, from torn-down

buildings, the cracks and holes stuffed with straw and pieces of newspapers ; from the roof hung monstrous cobwebs, waving like flags blackened by the dust, covering the walls like pieces of cloth displayed in a draper's shop.

The mule almost touched the roof with his ears, and seemed more enormous, outrageously large in his mean shelter. Maltrana thought of the miracles that habit works, for the fact that the mule had to glide every day through that gloomy passage where a man could hardly find room, was nothing short of miraculous. Zarathustra, leaving the stable, lifted a curtain of flowery percale, but Maltrana saw nothing, save an intense darkness.

" Light a match," said the rag-picker.

When they lighted a bit of candle stuck in the neck of a bottle that stood on top of a commode, Isidro was able to perceive a cave smaller than the one that served as stable. Its roof was of straw and the walls were full of hooks from which hung the wearing apparel of the old couple : worn-out silk skirts, frock-coats full of patches, tall hats with fur standing on end and contracted as if they had been bellows.

" Some style here ! " exclaimed the rag-picker. " You can't deny there is style here. Look at that commode ; look at this bed, which must have belonged to some duke. You think you are in a palace when you look at it. These pieces of furniture cost me a good many excellent *pesetas* at El Rastro. I bought them from the relatives of Mariposa, a bunch of stuck-ups who, when they found themselves rich, turned up their noses at their relatives. We are still scrapping about a few *pesetas* I refuse to give them. . . . But pay attention, lad, this is all worth seeing."

And Maltrana was forced to look in the light of the candle at the high old-fashioned bed, gilt all over, but so old that in places the gilt had peeled off or had lost its lustre, and in others it was green, revealing its long stay in forgotten attics where the rain had filtered through the cracks.

Zarathustra then showed with the pride of an artist the ornaments covering those parts of the wall that were free from clothes : pictures of saints, chromolithographs of

naked gentlemen or of pink-coloured danseuses, all of them collected as they happened to come in the search, and immediately stuck in the room, by means of tacks or chewed bread. Finally, the rag-picker showed him the treasure of the house : several boards placed between the bed and the wall and on them heaps of coarse china saucers, dozens of cups of the same material, used in the cafés, piles of glasses stuck into each other.

" If I wanted to, I could invite the whole district of Carolinas without having to borrow anything from anybody. Look, boy, tell me if your grandmother has ever found herself among such wealth. This looks like a café at the Puerta del Sol."

In the tremulous light of the candle, Maltrana saw the plates, crossed by black fissures, the cups, cracked or without handles, the glasses, chipped at the edge. They constituted the spoil of the establishments whose rubbish Polo gathered and which he had collected for years and years without any definite notion of the profit he might derive from the collection which was his pride.

The bedroom had no ventilation other than the door. The roof was so low that between it and the bed there was only the necessary room to sleep lying down flat. One had to glide into it as if going into a burrow. Isidro remarked upon the lack of windows.

" That's the best feature of this bedroom. When it is cold or freezing, with the heat from the mule and the manure we sleep here so nicely that Heaven itself couldn't be better. You may know how cosy we are in here when you see that even in winter we have flies. Not even in Oriente Square are they as comfortable as we are here on a snowy day."

The rag-picker lifted the candle to the roof, carefully touching, as if they had been delicate and precious objects, the dusty cobwebs that hung from the straw.

" Look here . . . cobwebs. D'you see them ? Here, there, everywhere. We may not have windows or skylights or other things that are superfluous, as well as bad for the health, but cobwebs. . . . I could bet with the richest man that mine are better than anyone else's."

Maltrana seemed somewhat disconcerted by the seriousness with which Zarathustra spoke.

"Wherever you find cobwebs, you will find health," continued the old man. "Those good-for-nothing doctors in Madrid don't know this, because they read books and laugh at wise men like myself whose books are the earth and the sky. In the city houses there are no cobwebs, and city people are all thin, yellowish and die young. Cobwebs are a gift of God and they preserve our health. They filter the air and take from it the bad beasts that make us sick, the microbes and other insects."

Thus spoke Zarathustra, moving the light along the roof, and from the darkness emerged the hanging webs of the spiders, enormous, centuries old, as if they were the work of several generations, filtering with pinkish hues the light of the candle. The old man avoided breaking any of the fragile textures. They hung until they nearly touched his bed; he shook them with his snores when he slept, and felt very much annoyed on waking up, if he found a cobweb fallen down near his mouth.

"This is the sort of thing that lengthens your life; this can't be bought with money. If your grandmother wants to start something, just let her touch one of them."

Returning to the yard, Maltrana closed his eyes, blinded by the sun, and breathed the pure air with difficulty, after his short stay in that cavern saturated with dust and manure.

He again saw Madrid in front of him like a gigantic pile with its towers, in which bells were ringing, and with its chimneys blackened by smoke. He felt overawed at the strangeness of that rude and savage life which surrounded him in sight of a great nucleus of civilization. The hard and cruel past, the infancy of man, which had scarcely shed its primitive animality, was camping at the very gates of a modern city.

Zarathustra tried to retain the young man. It was rather painful to him to be deprived of an opportunity to talk and to display his science.

"D'you see what a beautiful sun we are having?" he

said. "Well, let me tell you that before the end of the week we shall have rain. The Funeral of the Sardine will be a wet one. The face of the moon should be carefully watched every night. I either don't know a thing about the heavens, or this moon announces great revolutions, famine, pests, blood. . . ."

"Good-bye, great Zarathustra," said Maltrana.

The old man could continue to philosophize, surrounded by his dogs, contemplating the ungrateful city that refused to recognize his learning. Maltrana was going to Carolinas, fleeing from that stinking gloom that had upset his stomach. He wanted to see his friend Mosco and Feliciana, whose virgin hands—the only ones in the district that were comparatively clean—were worthy of a thousand kisses for their ability in preparing a *cachuela*.

And he started on his way, followed for a considerable distance by Zarathustra's dogs.

When he reached the district of Carolinas, he stood for a moment disconcerted and confused by the aspect it presented in the full tide of the Carnival. Among that crowd, bedecked with the spoils of the city, it was hard to tell who were masqueraders and who were those who went about in their ordinary clothes. A boy passed near him; on one foot he wore a patent leather boot and on the other a brown shoe; a pair of men's trousers, creased and tattered, covered his legs and his head was protected by a lady's battered straw hat with some remains of artificial flowers. No; he was not a masquerader. He walked with the gravity of a poor boy doing errands for his parents, and hugged against his bosom a bottle that was to be filled at the tavern. Nor were masqueraders, either, the ragged women dressed in multi-coloured skirts he saw in the distance, the men in soldiers' coats, or in bottle-green frock-coats, the tails of which covered the patched legs of their trousers, while their hairy chests showed between the silk lining of the lapels.

An old cardboard masque, or a rag with holes for the eyes, was the only thing that distinguished the masqueraders in that crowd where everybody seemed to be equally disguised.

In the middle of the narrow streets, near the doors of the houses and in the interior of the yards, heaps of coloured paper were mixed up with the rubbish—the remains of the first day of Carnival, the confetti and the paper tapes gathered up in the morning on the promenades, the residuum of the joy of a people mingled in that cesspool with the remnants of their clothing and food. Some children waved paper flags, garlands of distorted flowers and other frills that had dropped off from the carriages along the Castellana during the preceding afternoon.

Isidro went along several streets, most of which were formed by yard fences. Above them appeared big pyramids of rotten straw used in the making of tiles. At the noise of his footsteps, ferocious mastiffs thrust their snouts through the fences, protesting in muffled barkings.

An odour of damp dung impregnated the air. Through the half-open doors one could see, nosing the heaps of old shoes and piles of rags, the pigs of the yards that were sold to the dealers of the suburbs, after they had been fattened with the refuse of the city. Maltrana looked with great repugnance at those sordid, savagely voracious animals. He remembered Mosco's confidences, his raging at some of the neighbours who, when they found a dead dog in the streets of Madrid, brought it home in their cart and threw it into the yard, where in a short time it became a fleshless skeleton.

When Maltrana issued into a large open space, free from houses, the sight of the clear sky and of the mountains dissipated his feeling of nausea.

The rose-coloured mass of the Guadarrama crowned by pyramids of salt bordered the horizon. Struck by the sun the snow glistened on the summits. Its virginal whiteness stood out boldly from the intense blue of the sky and fell in serpentine lines down the slopes along the precipices and crags. The grandeur of the panorama banished from the memory the ant-hill of rag-pickers, where human beings found their subsistence in the refuse discarded by their fellow-beings.

Maltrana began to descend the slope of the last street

in Carolinas—the one where Mosco lived. In front of him, at the end of a double row of miserable houses, was the Cerro del Pino, the fountain of Caño Dorado, a leafy nook planted by the builders of the Lozoya canal which in the course of years, had grown into a wood.

The young man saw a group of children coming towards him. At their head marched a masquerader, his face besmeared with soot, dressed with pieces of canvas and paper and waving a broom in one hand.

"Guess who I am! Guess who I am!"

And by way of salute, he let him have the broom full in the face, and ran away with vacillating steps, squealing and followed by the infantile mob, who howled with delight at his joke.

Ah! Confounded drunkard! Of course he knew him. . . . He was Coleta, who amused the whole neighbourhood with his drunken extravagances.

Isidro kept on, and upon arrival at Mosco's house, he had to knock several times on the closed door.

A woman came, her arms crossed over her stomach. She was Borracha, Coleta's mistress, a tatterdemalion who wore a bandage across her forehead and a little linen curtain hanging over one eye. Even in that filthy district, she had quite a reputation for the neglect of her own person. She had scabs on her hands, never washed through fear, perhaps, that the water might dim the tin rings that adorned her fingers. A tumour was corroding the gristle of her nose. Filth and alcohol were plasting her flesh, according to Coleta, who in his drunken fits insulted her with the nickname of Borracha (drunkard).

"They are not at home, Señor Isidro," she said with hypocritical meekness. "Mosco went away this morning with Señor Manolo, taking the cages and the nets with him. They are after the birds. The girl, Feliciana, is out masquerading. She went down with her friends to Caño Dorado a little while ago. . . . There she is; you can see her from here."

And she pointed out to Isidro a colourful group running through the trees of Cerro del Pino.

The young man went down the hill. Beyond the last dwellings of the rag-pickers, contrasting with the sordid poverty of the district, began the little wood of Caño Dorado. Under the beneficent influence of dampness, a group of murmuring trees peopled with birds had grown in the glade. A flower bed, remaining from the old garden, surrounded by a box fence neatly trimmed, extended around the Caño Dorado—the fountain whence the girls of Carolinas obtained their supply of water for household purposes.

It was a peaceful and silent corner, full, in the spring, of flowers and bird songs that were unknown to the inhabitants of Madrid; a hidden paradise, a piece of poetry for the rag-picking horde that had encamped on the near-by hill.

Maltrana enjoyed the peace of Caño Dorado. Its old flower beds reminded him of the Moncloa gardens, but the former was more secluded, more rustic, and one did not find in its walks a living soul save a child with a pitcher of water on its shoulder. Besides, he was charmed by the perpetual jet that fell from the golden pipe into the four-circled basin.

As the young man entered the wood, he saw the masqueraders Coleta's mistress had pointed out to him coming towards him.

"It's Isidro! . . . It's the learned man! The one who writes in the papers!"

The group surrounded him—all women. Tired of parading up and down the streets of the district, where they had to defend themselves against the coarse attentions of the lads, they had withdrawn to the little wood, and remained there satisfied with their disguise, but bored, with their masks in their hands, playing like children. Perceiving Maltrana, they put on their masks again and wheeled around him, pushing him, pulling him by the lapel of his coat, shouting and making more noise than a yardful of cackling hens.

"Guess who I am! Guess who I am!"

Some were dressed like little girls, in gaudy colours, their somewhat oily hair hanging loose over their backs, displaying below their short skirts their well-turned legs and the stripes of their tawdry stockings. Others were

dressed like boys of the streets of Madrid, wearing trousers that seemed ready to burst under pressure of their fat legs. Small red handkerchiefs were tied round their necks and under their caps showed the curls of their hair, done up in *chulo* fashion.

As they wheeled around Maltrana, they enveloped him in a spiral of musk, cheap perfume with which the virgins had soaked themselves to add a little splendour to their merrymaking.

"Guess who I am!" shouted the well-proportioned pseudo-lads, pulling his moustache and slapping him with such enthusiasm that his cheeks reddened.

"Guess who I am!" yelled a pink baby on whom Maltrana had riveted his attention.

"You bet I know you, girl!" exclaimed the youth. "You are Feliciana. There aren't in the whole district hands such as yours. That's why you are not wearing gloves, oh you coquette!"

Many of the masqueraders ran away screaming, astonished at the recognition and offended by the allusion to their gloved hands. A group of lads was coming down the hill, and the girls, wishing to be chased by them, went out to meet them.

Maltrana was left almost alone, close to his baby. The most intimate companions had moved a few steps away and had fixed their attention on the meeting between the lads and the masqueraders.

"Yes, you are Feliciana," the young man said again, taking her hands. "Tell me: when will your father return home? . . ."

"I am not Feliciana!" screeched the masquerader in a tremulous voice that seemed to quiver with rage. "Feliciana has uglier hands than mine. The proof of it is that you have seen them time and again and you have never said a word about them to the poor girl."

"Come on, girl, don't talk nonsense. Have you girls been drinking this afternoon?"

"You are stinking with pride, Isidro," continued the masquerader, speaking hurriedly, as if afraid her courage

would give out before she finished. "You are a swell-head, and you are full of your own importance, you never pay any attention to anyone else. You are so proud at being called a wise man that you never look at people, and you don't have brains enough to guess the thoughts of those that are near you."

Maltrana listened to her with the greatest astonishment. "What nonsense is that you are talking, girl? Are you drunk?"

All the masqueraders had gone towards the glade where their merry shouts sounded as they chased each other. They were alone, but in spite of this the baby continued to speak in shrill tones, trying to disguise her voice, and her black eyes, peering through the holes in her mask, were fixed on those of Isidro.

"I am not Feliciana, but I am her best friend. She is like myself. . . . We are more than sisters. And d'you know what Feliciana says? . . . That you are swell-headed; that no matter how much she looks at you, you never pay any attention to her; that you think she is not good enough for you because she lives at Carolinas and goes to a cap factory. . . . Of course . . . as his lordship lives in Madrid and writes in the papers and dresses like a gentleman! . . . Goodness knows how many actresses are there in Madrid fighting over him, how many ladies are making love to him! . . ."

Maltrana laughed at the candour of the girl. The poor lass imagined his life as a continual round of triumph and successes. Her credulity was a cruel irony.

"Look here, girl," he said, "you must have been drinking. You are drunk, Feliciana."

"Feliciana again," she answered with irritation. "I have told you already that I am not Feliciana. If I were Feliciana I would let you have a few remarks, and with good reason too. Swelled-head! stuck-up! bluffer! . . . But don't get mad. I'm telling you all this because I have my mask on and because they did give us a little something to drink up on the hill. Poor Feliciana! Poor women! . . . You men have arranged things so that we have to

keep quiet and burst with sorrow if you don't happen to guess our thoughts. And you, you serious rascal, with all your knowledge, you are incapable of guessing ; you are so blind . . . that you can't distinguish between Feliciana herself and the rabbit *cachuelas* to which her father invites you."

It was Maltrana's turn to feel embarrassed, and he did not know what to answer. His timidity made him shrink before the audacity with which the masquerader expressed herself.

He had taken her again by the hands and squeezed them without know what to say, always repeating the same thing :

" Feliciana . . . Feliciana ! "

" Man, leave her alone. I've told you already that I am not Feliciana. What's the use of repeating her name ? For all the attention you ever pay her ! You have never looked her in the eyes ; you have never seen anything worthy of notice in her. You are reserving yourself for better things. Your mother wanted to see you married to some lady ; your grandmother is sure that some fine day you will come to see her in a carriage and pair with a lady of high degree. . . . Let Feliciana alone ; let the poor wretch cry her eyes out and rot with grief. But know this, you blackguard, boob, swelled-head, blind-bat : Feliciana has the misfortune of having fallen in love with you ; Feliciana loves you, but she is a woman and she says nothing, and her blood is rotting to see that this donkey either doesn't know it, or is a rascal who amuses himself pretending that he doesn't know it."

A sigh came from behind the mask. The baby placed her hands on her bosom, and through the holes in the cardboard one could see her tearful eyes.

Maltrana, disconcerted by the masquerader's words, did not know what to say. He instinctively stretched out his hand towards the mask and pulled it off.

Feliciana's congested face appeared—her eyes full of tears. When she found herself maskless, she tried to run away ; then attempted a smile.

"It has all been a joke. You must confess, Isidro, that I managed to kid you along in good shape ; and forget all my foolish talk."

"Feliciana," the young man said seriously, "do not cry. Joke or no joke, I bless your courage, that has enabled you to tell me such things. You are right ; I am a fool, but proud, never. The blind man can see now ; the heedless one notices now."

Without knowing what he was doing, one of his hands released the girl and instinctively slid down towards her waist.

Feliciana fixed on him her moist black eyes, like two drops of ink that reflected the distant furnace of the sun. The pressure of that arm around her waist seemed to destroy resistance, to vanquish her.

They looked at each other without venturing to say a word, frightened at their own daring, at finding themselves so close together.

The shouts of the masqueraders sounded near them. The merry group was returning from the glen, followed by the lads. The audacity that had made the girl speak under her mask suddenly forsook her. Her courage—the result of a few drops of wine and of the shelter of the mask—vanished completely. . . . Feliciana made a gesture as if she had suddenly awakened stark naked in the midst of a group of men. Wrenching herself free from Maltrana's arms, she ran towards a neighbouring tree ; leaned against it with her elbows and hid her face in her hands.

She did not want Isidro to see her. She was afraid to look at him. Now she was really crying ; and between sobs and sighs, she murmured :

"What a shame, oh Lord ! . . . What a shame ! "

CHAPTER V

"SIT down, young man. Make yourself at home; you know that I consider you as one of the family."

And Don Gaspar Jimenez caressed Maltrana with those patronizing little slaps on the shoulder that made the young man swell with pride.

They were in the senator's private office, a room furnished with the austerity befitting a man of his importance and brains. The chairs were covered with leather, the walls were dark. In a bookcase were lined up volumes of the *Sesiones del Cenado*, together with memoirs, statistics and tariff schedules; portly tomes printed at the expense of the country. Hanging from the walls in glittering frames were diplomas of honorary membership in several societies. bearing witness to the merits of the Marquis of Jimenez, and a large card, a prodigy of caligraphy, in which the senatorial electors from Castile congratulated "their worthy senator" for his brilliant speeches in defence of a protective policy towards their corn.

A life-size oil portrait filled one side of the office: the marquis in evening dress, with all his crosses and orders, leaning one elbow on the mantelpiece of his salon and holding his frowning forehead, laden with thoughts, with his right hand. A masterpiece! When Isidro looked at the pompous figure, its chest starred full of decorations, he found a certain resemblance between his powerful friend and a certain famous sleight of hand artist. He then felt a strong desire to roar with laughter at the seriousness and bluff with which the senator appeared in the portrait. He was a gentleman who even in his own house wished to appear as if at some ceremony or other.

The grave marquis, who always spoke to people in a patronizing way, seemed to hesitate before Maltrana.

He spoke to him in a distracted fashion, as if his thoughts were far away. He inquired with evidently forced curiosity after the life of the young man, his struggles, his aspirations, while he puckered his brow and his vague look seemed to be searching for some pretext to lead the conversation into the channel he desired.

Finally, he spoke of the motive that had prompted him to call Isidro.

"Yes, indeed, young man," he said, adopting the solemn tones he employed when speaking in the lobbies of the Senate. "I have taken the liberty to bring you here because I wish to make you a proposition which I consider highly beneficial to your own self. I believe that it is our duty to protect the rising generation. I love young people. Indeed, I am one of them, although many people refuse to believe it when they see me entirely given to serious studies, to grave problems one usually associates with old age. But, life is not a dream, as I had occasion to tell you once upon a time. Life is not a joke, and one must accept it as the serious problem it is. . . . Besides, that which will perhaps be very beneficial to yourself, will no doubt prove extremely profitable to me, and if you accept my proposition, I shall be eternally grateful to you."

Isidro, who was attentively listening to the senator's words, oratorical hackneyed phrases, could make neither head nor tail out of it all. What did the marquis want of him? There he was, ready to serve him if he would only state plainly what was his idea.

The senator began to speak again with the same ambiguity and circumlocutions, as if afraid to disclose his thoughts suddenly. He was a very busy man. Not in the whole of Madrid a man had less time than he for his private affairs. On one side, there was the sacred defence of the corn; on the other, the societies for Catholic propaganda among the working classes; they took up his entire time. He was vice-president of some leagues and secretary of others, and he considered it a sacred duty not to miss any

of their meetings. Besides, his party was always calling upon him about matters of discipline ; he enjoyed the utmost confidence of the party's chief, from whose receptions he could not possibly absent himself, and he had to look after the education of his own boys : two irreproachable lads who entertained their father's healthy ideas and were worthy of the praise bestowed upon them by their former teachers, the good fathers of the Society of Jesus.

Maltrana listened to those words with grave shakes of the head and mental outbursts of laughter. He knew the lads by sight ; he had met them many nights at the Romea Theatre and other places where theatrical stars of the smallest magnitude sing and dance. One was in the habit of signing blank cheques to all the usurers in Madrid in order to provide for the upkeep of a certain *divette* from Perpignan.

" Under these circumstances, then," continued the senator in oratorical tones, " it is utterly impossible for me to undertake any literary work, to put my modest ideas in black and white. For you must know, Maltrana my friend, that I am a writer also. That is why I have so much love for those young men like yourself, who have given themselves up to the cultivation of *belles lettres*. . . . According to my friends, I am a rather good speaker; well, believe me : I am a far better writer than an orator. I have published very little ; my modesty forbids it. But if you only knew the stacks of paper I have scribbled ! . . ."

And as if he perceived in Maltrana an indication of curiosity, he hastened to add :

" Oh, no ! I cannot show you any of my writings. My modesty forces me to tear them up before I even finish them. I really need someone to help me, to push me along. I am full of ideas, lots of ideas. What I need is the help, the collaboration of a young man who may have plenty of time to write : a young man such as yourself."

Isidro understood that the great man had finally come to the point. On his face shone the relief of having got rid of a shameful proposition that had been torturing him.

The young man accepted in a few words. What kind of work was he expected to perform? He was ready to serve him and felt very thankful that the noble gentleman should have thought of him.

And, really, poor Maltrana felt that the senator was honouring him with his proposition.

What the Marquis of Jimenez wanted was to write a book, a notable book that should reaffirm his prestige as an economist, a deep thinker. He did not wish to hide anything from Maltrana and confessed to him that such a book would be a rung, the last rung, in fact, that would enable him to reach the Cabinet as soon as his party returned to power. The chief himself had promised to write a preface for his work.

"You can see, friend Maltrana, what an honour that is, what an honour for us! . . ."

That *us* left the young man cold. He renounced beforehand everything, save the remuneration that the marquis should be pleased to give him.

"You will write," continued the great man, "and I will supply the ideas, and everything will work as smooth as oil, as one might say. . . . You are a discreet young man who can understand *things* and will not *wave the red flag* by mixing up in the work some of those diabolical progressive ideas affected by so many youths of our day. The book shall be dedicated to His Majesty the King; that is all I need to say. Just a simple dedication, which you will have the kindness to write; but it must be beautiful. Just a matter of telling him that as he is the first soldier of the nation, the first farmer, the first hunter, the first in everything, whether it be in national policies or in driving a motor car, so is he, for myself and for all those who have something to lose, the first sociologist. Isn't that a wonderful idea for a dedication? . . ."

Isidro answered with affirmative nods.

"Because my work, friend Maltrana, is going to be socialistic. . . . Do not be afraid; socialistic in the true sense, that is to say, according to practical socialism, to that socialism that does exist and that is upheld by

healthy minds, blending the exigencies of the times with the holy traditions of the past and all vested interests."

The young man asked what ideas were to guide him in writing the book, what would be the powerful web upon which he would have to work " as smooth as oil," as the great man had said.

" The work might be entitled ' True Socialism ,' but if you can think of a prettier title, go ahead and do not mind me ; I am not fussy in the least. You do whatever you like ; you are the boss. Do whatever you consider proper ; the more initiative you display, the better."

And very gravely, puckering up his brow, as if each idea were painfully extracted, he developed his plan. The book would be a hymn to charity. Let the rich give to the poor, let the poor respect the rich, and let both put their trust in the Catholic Church, for centuries the consummate teacher in these matters, and in His Holiness the Pope, the first socialist of true socialism.

" I think that is enough for you to go ahead with the book," he continued. " What you have to do is by far the easiest part ; namely, to write it. But that takes time, and I have no time at my disposal. You will admit that these ideas of mine are by no means commonplace ; that they open up entirely new vistas. To expound them is an easy matter, but I know how long it has taken me to turn them over in my mind, to give them shape, to prepare them so that you would have nothing to do but put them down on paper. Besides, I have my own ideas about the shape of the book. It must be thick, very thick. Do not be afraid to spread yourself ; we'll spend in printing as much as necessary. The chapters must have at the top those paragraphs in small print they call summaries. That kind of thing has always pleased me ; it gives a certain air of seriousness and orderliness. Then, I want all the pages to have notes, plenty of notes, that will take up as much room as the text itself. I have noticed that all important works have plenty of notes. That also gives a certain air of seriousness and proves the erudition of the author. We must cite a host of names, foreign names, if

possible ; the more crooked they are, the better. You can do this easily; it is only a matter of consulting a few books, of spending a few mornings in the Library. If I had the time ! . . ."

Maltrana smiled as he listened to his protector's instructions.

" Your task is easy," continued the marquis. " Do not run away with the idea that I do not know where to find authorities. In this matter of a healthy and orderly socialism we are agreed with some European masters. According to the chief, there is a professor, an Italian or a Swiss, I don't remember which, who has written a famous book on Catholic Socialism. One has not time to read everything. Look it up yourself ; that will make an extra authority."

The senator continued to speak for a long time about his book in order to show Maltrana the ease with which he could write it, founding it on the firm base of his ideas.

" And, mind you, it isn't that I am trying to belittle your task in order to under-pay you. I know that this kind of work ought to be well paid. Besides, I love young folks and I want to protect them. I will give you three thousand *reales* for your work ; but the book must be thick, do you understand ? And above all, full of notes. . . . Plenty of notes. Perhaps, if you do the work exactly as I have conceived it, I may give you four thousand. For a start, here you have a twenty *duros* note, for initial expenses . . . paper, ink, pens."

Maltrana seized the note with a certain emotion, answering incoherently the recommendations of the great man.

" Get busy, young man. Life is not a dream ; we have to work ; we must be practical. With a serious young man, like yourself, I do not think it necessary to recommend that you be very prudent. This transaction must remain absolutely secret. Besides, it does not mean a great deal ; it only means that I lack time to write. I am giving you the book ready made ; all you have to do is to put it in black and white. Ah ! if only I had a little leisure!"

He again recommended that Maltrana should not forget the summaries of the chapters and the notes, plenty of notes, with tremendous array of authorities.

"That kind of thing looks very well. When you have a chapter ready, bring it to me, and so on with all of them. I will copy them, one by one, so that they may go to the printer in my own handwriting. Although I am so very busy, I think I shall have time to do that little job."

When Maltrana found himself in the street, he thought that Fortune herself was walking in front of him, opening a way for him with the fluttering of her golden wings. He did not feel the least remorse for the mercenary work with which he had been entrusted. He laughed at Catholic Socialism and at the *ideas* of his benefactor ; a few fatuities which that confounded fool thought good enough for the skeleton of his book. What an idiot Señor Jimenez was ! . . . But he respected him, seeing in him an envoy of Providence who would change the course of his life, pulling him out, with an unexpected success, from the miserable quagmire into which he had sunk through lack of will power.

The little note of one hundred *pesetas*, folded in one of his vest pockets, weighed like a ballast that gave his person new aplomb. He could see more notes, more money coming after it, and all of it just for filling up several hundred sheets with pieces stolen from other books, utter nonsense totally inadmissible to him, but which the worthy senator would unhesitatingly sign, giving it the sanction of his elevated personality.

The solemn Marquis of Jimenez could sleep at ease. He would have the book sooner than he expected ; thick, very thick, with notes, with summaries, even with appendixes, and with a tumultuous stream at the bottom of each page, of names of known and unknown authors, with the addition of a few that he himself would invent. It was very unlikely that the senator would not feel satisfied, and as soon as he had tasted the sweets of being an author at such small cost, he would repeat the order, giving him ideas for new books. Isidro would suggest to him the idea of becoming

an academician, of conquering Immortality by bombarding her with thick volumes of endless notes that nobody would read. Isidro had found a mine; thenceforth he would have a fixed income.

And the Bohemian, without any remorse for the literary piracy, accepting it as his deliverance from poverty, decided to exchange the note and begin right away to enjoy his wealth.

It was a little after noon. Maltrana went to the "tavern of the geniuses," an establishment he visited only in his prosperous days. What a feast he was going to have! He looked on the bill-of-fare for the best dishes, the names of which he gloomily read on the evenings when he entered the café with no capital other than one *peseta*. Hurrah for wealth! He ate all he wanted and of the best, he had a cup of coffee and ordered a Havana cigar of the very finest quality to be bought from the Tabacalera of Seville Street. He wanted to celebrate his success in due form.

Wrapped up in a bluish cloud of perfumed smoke, sipping a glass of cognac, he felt the placidity of a good digestion, and his faith in his destiny became stronger and stronger as he filled up his stomach.

He was thinking of the future. His benefactor was right; life is not a joke; he would have to reorganize his life entirely. Work demands method; he would suppress his nocturnal life; he would not go to the editorial rooms any more. He could no longer live in the hovel of Artistas Street, waiting for his stepfather and his brother to leave the bed before he could lie down in it himself. The end had come for his sad and wandering Bohemian life. He had a right to a home, like everybody else. . . . And why not get a woman to accompany him in that rise towards Fortune on which he thought he had already started? . . .

The image of Feliciana, of sweet Feli, as he called her, seemed to appear before his eyes among the clouds of bluish smoke.

The impression of surprise and pride which the girl's words produced on his mind four days before, still lasted.

He, so homely and miserable that he inspired only indifference or disdain in women, found himself suddenly loved, and, wonder of wonders ! it was the woman who had come out to meet him, and in a fit of mad audacity, had offered herself to him.

He admitted to himself that a good deal of admiration was comprised in Feliciana's love for him. The poor girl of Carolinas adored him as a superior being. He was the only man who had revealed to her the existence of a life different from the savage, filthy, violent life that surrounded her.

" To poor Feli," thought Maltrana, " I represent poetry, a piece of heaven that descends towards her, something superior that she loves and reveres at the same time. Provided she does not feel disappointed on closer acquaintanceship ! . . ."

Fortune had whipped him during long years, to give him everything suddenly : money and love. Since Feli made her confession, he had not been able to sleep without dreams in which Mosco's daughter caressed him, holding him in her arms. When he awoke, her image remained fixed in his memory, ennobled and beautified by his dream, one illusion more added to those he carried in the baggage of his hopes.

When Maltrana asked himself if he really loved Feliciana, he hesitated, not knowing exactly what to answer. He knew another love than that of comedies and novels, and he nobly confessed to himself that his love did not belong to that class. Accustomed by his philosophic penchant to seek a cause for everything, to dissect passions, opening them up in order to surprise their secret, he converted into fleshless skeletons the most passionate feelings.

No ; he did not love Feli with a burning passion, but he felt sweetly attracted by her. In this attraction, there was something of gratitude and something of personal pride, of flattered self-esteem. He desired her, besides, through egotism, as an attractive female who could beautify his life.

Maltrana, with great detriment to his dignity as a philo-

sopher, dreamt many a time when he was awake and thinking of his future. When his imagination soared like an eagle, he saw himself acclaimed by the nations, recognized by all as the greatest genius of the century, presiding, in the name of science, over the United States of Europe, which lived happily, thanks to Maltrana, the great Maltrana I, modern Napoleon of the great conquests of progress.

At other times, he did not fly quite so high in his dreams. No government, no United States of Europe or similar nonsense for him ; he was satisfied to be a mere individual with an assured income that would cover all his wants so that he could spend his life in study amid plenty. And the young man as he wrote his translations, dreamt that some day he would have a home of his own, lots of books and a few objects of art. Then, when he felt tired of work a pair of feminine arms, naked and white, would slip from behind and embrace him, and a caressing mouth would whisper into his ear words of endearment.

Such a dream was not impossible of realization ; it would come true. The moment had arrived for the fulfilment of his dream. The good fairy of the stories was walking in front of him with her golden wand, strewing his path with roses.

He left the tavern, his enormous cigar between his lips, blowing smoke in front of him as if his own dreams escaped through his mouth and preceded him on his way.

The warm afternoon sun and the transparent blue sky seemed to penetrate his soul. A few masqueraders still wandered along the streets, remnants of the past festival. Maltrana smiled at them, finding them interesting. Through his own imagination, too, there passed, like masqueraders, his most picturesque fancies.

Happy in his present well-being, he started to walk towards Cuatro Caminos. He thought of stopping at Bravo Murillo Street, opposite the factory where Feli worked, and there wait for her and tell her of the good luck that had unexpected come to embellish his existence.

Going along the pavement of the wide street, beyond the old Depositos, Isidro met an old acquaintance.

" How do you do, Don Vicente ? "

From the size of his carefully-groomed clothes it was apparent that they had not been fashioned for him. His hat, larger than his head, had been narrowed down to fit him by means of strips of paper hidden inside the sweat band. His face was reddish, with deep wrinkles in which the skin seemed white and shining. His inflamed eyes, lashless and bloodshot, kept blinking constantly. His ears were so detached from his head that they looked like fluttering wings. The white and yellow tips of his moustache and his beard gave evidence that some awkward scissors had been at them. Don Vicente looked strong and seemed to enjoy the health of a rustic, capable of enduring the greatest hardships, but privation had reduced his body and interfered with his gait, and he walked with uncertain steps, as if his legs moved only through nervous impulses. He gesticulated freely and was in the habit of talking to himself, without minding in the least the astonished looks of other people. Now and again he stopped and, holding one elbow in one hand, he held in the other his forehead, crossed by a vertical wrinkle.

When he heard the young man greeting him, he hesitated for a while, as if his inflamed eyes could not recognize Isidro.

" Ah ! Is it you, Señor Maltrana ? " he asked in a sweet voice. " God bless you ! Are you working hard ? . . ."

Maltrana happened to know him because of his nocturnal occupation. As Isidro never went to bed until well on in the morning and his friend always got up before dawn, they had met many a time in the streets of Madrid, near the markets, when the morning was still young.

Isidro felt for him a certain admiration mixed with irony. The poor man had arrived too late in the world, just as he, in his youthful arrogance, thought he had arrived too early to be understood. Two centuries before, the multitude would have revered Señor Vicente ; kings would have visited him in his miserable hovel ; pious people, at the hour of his death, would have fallen over his corpse tearing his clothes and hair to keep as holy relics, and perhaps by this time he

would appear on the altars, his miserable garments turned into a magnificent golden cloak.

He always carried his pockets full of printed sheets containing prayers and religious newspapers of religious propaganda that had been given him by Catholic societies to distribute. Maltrana had met him early one morning in Cebada Square having a wordy fight with a carter who urged on his horses with a volley of tremendous blasphemies. Señor Vicente had knelt down, his arms in the shape of the cross, begging the driver to strike him with his whip, to spend his fury on him, provided he would leave alone the holy name of God, for he wished to die rather than hear it abused. Isidro had felt a great deal of interest in that maniac who wandered about Madrid amidst the abuse and ridicule of the mob. Had he been born in other times, he would have founded an order, a new religious cult, and would have left his mark in history.

He met him afterwards several mornings, near the markets, stopping the servants to give them prayers and pictures of saints, speaking to them about the Virgin, his eyes fixed on high, perfectly oblivious of the merriment that shook the girls in spite of the fact that they felt a certain amount of pity for the poor fellow, who yet seemed to be a perfect gentleman.

Sometimes he found him sitting at a cobbler's stand, his head leaning against the anti-clerical cartoons of *El Motin* stuck on the wall, talking to the cobbler about God and the saints, heedless of the mocking songs of his host and the noise of the hammer falling on the leather. He used to go into taverns, undaunted by the jests of the merry customers who invited him to have a drink. Thanks! He never drank. Wine hurt his eyes. But, for the sake of having them listen to him, he finally took a little something, by way of penance, gulping it down with contortions as if it had been poison, and he spoke to them of his simple prayers, of his quiet, pious life. Maltrana had also seen him very angry, raging like a peaceful lunatic who has suddenly lost his good temper. That was when the drinkers greeted him with oaths carefully selected to excite his fury.

At first he closed his eyes and lowered his head like a martyr in the early agonies of torture, but his patience became exhausted when he found the insults were taking in the whole of the heavenly court. Then, the powerful man, used to violence, which lay dormant, reasserted himself, and clenched his fists in threatening attitude.

"Virgin Mary! Most Holy Lord!" he raged, in tones not unlike those assumed by the blasphemers when they offended God.

But, as soon as the jesters, taking pity on his fury, which literally blinded him, stopped their insults, the excitable maniac calmed down and called all those who surrounded him "brethren."

Maltrana had found him also in the neighbourhood of Cuatro Caminos, talking to the octroi officials, going into the picnic grounds and talking of God to the groups gathered around a mess of chicken stew and a bottle of wine, or to the couples who, their arms clasped around each other's waists, rested on a bench, panting and sweating from the exertion of the dance.

"My affairs are going on first-rate, Señor Vicente," said Maltrana, answering his question. "And where are you bound for? The mission?"

The holy man smiled, winking his bleary eyes with innocent malice.

"We must not take a rest, Señor Maltrana. These days have been trying ones for the Lord's infinite kindness. How His holy name must have been abused in these masqueraders' revels! What sins must have tried His inexhaustible kindness! . . . This is a good time to do a little missionary work, now that they are tired and disillusioned."

And he looked towards Cuatro Caminos, as if in that district were living not miserable working folks, but dissolute people who spent Carnival in full bacchanalian orgies. Isidro suggested that he should return to Madrid if he wanted to convert great sinners; in the suburbs he would find only miserable wretches who, lacking bread, were not very likely to think of orgies.

"Everywhere there are sinners who need advice," answered Señor Vicente. "One chooses his field according to his strength. The theologians, the learned priests, the big birds of the Church are taking care of the higher-ups. I am only a linnet of the Lord who sings as best he can; I go to the humble, to the only ones who can understand me. And even then, if you knew what tremendous efforts it costs me to save certain souls! Fourteen years I spent in bringing a shoemaker to the right path. His conversion is the best I ever made. The time and energy I wasted on him! . . . But I should not say 'wasted,' no . . . it should be 'gained,' for, after all, I brought him back into the fold. He was a terror, a man with hair on his soul, who did not give a rap for Heaven. In Granada, at the time of the revolution, he became a rebel and threw the Holy Virgin from Her altar. (Here Señor Vicente took off his hat and bowed down.) Well, I have him like a lamb now. A month ago he enrolled in the brotherhood of the Sacrament in his parish. He is my best conquest."

"And how are your eyes getting on?" asked Isidro.

"How do you expect them to get on? Very badly, wretchedly. I get too easily excited. Those sinners give me a lot of trouble."

Maltrana advised him to try and keep cool.

"How do you think I can keep cool?" shouted Don Vicente, getting excited. "My blood boils when I hear some hooligan insulting God with filthy oaths. It is the same as if a bullet had struck me full in the chest. I would rather be killed, yes, sir, rather be killed than have to listen to such blasphemies."

And as he spoke, he struck his chest and opened his arms as if he were offering the young man his life, begging him to kill him. Some passers-by stayed their steps and looked at the old man, who moved his arms and legs as if challenging invisible enemies.

"Keep calm, Señor Vicente," said Maltrana. "Take care of yourself. Spare your own life so that you may serve your God."

"If everybody were like yourself, Señor Maltrana!"

exclaimed the pious man respectfully. "You are one of the green ones; I know you. You live without giving God and His Holy Mother a thought; but you are an educated man; you don't mock at holy things; you don't blaspheme. You are good, and some day God will touch your heart. That's why I am not saying a thing to you. How could I, miserable sparrow of the Lord, when you read so much and know such a lot! . . . I can't do anything else but pray for the salvation of your soul, and, believe me, many a portion of the rosary have I prayed for your sake. You forget the Lord because your affairs are not going on very well; but some day you will feel the effects of His mercy, and you will repent, and you will remember Brother Vicente's words."

Wishing to wile away the time until Feliciana should come, in the company of this original character, who wanted to continue on his way to Cuatro Caminos, Maltrana tried to detain him longer.

"You were a soldier once, weren't you?" he asked to lengthen the conversation.

"Yes, I was a soldier once. Others, who are now saints, were soldiers before me." And as he remembered the times when he was a soldier, his words vibrated with a certain pride; the same sort of arrogant satisfaction displayed by the Church when it mentions that many of her saints have wielded the sword before assuming the halo.

"Did I never tell you, Friend Isidro? I was a soldier and I got mixed up in that mess at Alcolea, but I was on the wrong side. You know what discipline means. I was a corporal in Cadiz: they gave the order and I had to follow the officers, firing my rifle against religion, the queen and everything that is traditional and good. That is the greatest sin of my life, but God will forgive me, for I was forced into it, and I hadn't the least intention of offending Him. . . . Afterwards I left the service and gave myself up entirely to holy pursuits."

"And why didn't you become a monk?"

"It wasn't my fault if I didn't, Señor Maltrana. A marquis, an old colonel of mine, and a very pious person,

did his level best to have me admitted into a monastery; but they didn't want to take me in. I am not worthy enough to wear the gown."

He said the last words lowering his head, doubling himself up, the better to show his humility. The young man thought of the monks who had felt afraid of Señor Vicente's exuberant fervour, realizing that his holy mania—of the wandering type—could not possibly be confined within a monastery.

"But," he continued, "I live the same as if I belonged to an order. I have my own rule. A priest wrote me down on a piece of paper all I have to do every hour of the day, and I follow his directions under pain of offending the Lord. The rule recommends me to walk, to walk a lot, to take several hours' exercise without thinking on holy matters. Another priest amended the first paper, ordering me to take even more exercise, to spend the whole afternoon in the country. They say that if I don't do as they tell me, I shall go off my head, and the devil will torture me with his evil temptations. I obey; I go to the country every afternoon; each day to a different suburb. I have wandered around Madrid twenty times at least. There are no suburbs, children or women that Brother Vicente is not acquainted with. The holy pictures I have distributed! . . . I take a walk, through obedience; I talk to the birds, to the dogs, to all of God's good creatures who accompany me in my walks; but how could I stop thinking about holy things? . . . I simply can't . . . I can't . . . and I sin through disobedience."

Señor Vicente became irritated by his inability to forget for a few moments all matters pertaining to the soul and to the greatness of Heaven.

"They tell me that I think too much, Señor Maltrana, and perhaps they are right. There are nights when my head seems to boil, and I can't sleep. The Evil One tortures me with infamous pictures. The priests and the gentlemen of the Conferences also tell me that I eat too little, that I must look after my body. . . . That can't be right; there have been some famous saints who ate less

than a bird, and I, Señor Maltrana, there are days when I don't fast, but instead, I spend one *real* or more for my meals. The good ladies who protect me give money and many suits of clothes, and they recommend me to look after myself, but I say ' yes ' to everything and then I go and give their best gifts to the poor wretches who live in sin, to see if in this fashion I can soften them and make them repent. As a layman, I try to appear clean and decent : I think I do not look so bad."

As he said this, he regarded himself from his feet to his chest. Maltrana noticed his shirt of coarse cloth, the collar showing above several turns of a dark tie. The black, restless dot of a parasite crawled between the edge of the cloth and the reddish skin of Señor Vicente's neck.

" I need only one *real* per day to support myself," continued the pious man with a certain pride. " I have never bought a newspaper, and I don't know what it is to have a box of matches in my pocket. I go to bed in the dark ; and as for newspapers, I don't give a rap about any of them, for I take no interest whatever in politics. At the present moment, I don't know who is governing Spain. It is the same to me ; they are all alike : fakers, crooks, scoundrels ; and politics is a farce, a sham, lies, foolishness."

The pious man became very excited as he spoke. His words rushed from his mouth, and he bowed his head, as if the verbose stream weighed it down.

" Liberalism, Señor Maltrana, and all that talk about progress and revolutions may be condensed into a few words ; just what I say, ' to kill, to rob and to harm no one. . . .' They kill the soul, they steal it from God. And then they go and say they don't harm anyone. . . . Freedom ! The people follow its shams because they flatter the beast that is within all of us and that wants to work its own will. But man is bad and he needs a good cat-of-nine-tails. Let man attain absolute freedom and we shall see some outrageous things."

Maltrana, highly amused at this conversation, feigned approval with a nod of his head.

" You must have read a lot, Don Vicente."

"Nothing, Señor Maltrana; I am a layman. I haven't enough capacity to understand theological works. Besides, my eyes are not in very good shape for reading. . . . But I have a lot of books, lots of them; they would fill up more than three carts. I spend all my money on them; all the second-hand booksellers in Madrid know me. As soon as a nicely-bound old book on moral theology, the canons, or the lives of the saints falls into their hands, they set it aside, saying 'This one for Brother Vicente.' What a lot I spend on books! I could live in a small garret, or with some Christian family, but my books are my family, and I pay eight *duros* per month for a room so as to have my books properly arranged. I have no chairs, no bed; I don't use any light; I sleep on the floor on a straw mattress, but my books are in their nice clean shelves, just as they might be in the library of some seminary or bishop. They constitute my only vice, my weakness, my sinful pleasure. They seem to me to form a garden, the garden of eternal knowledge. Each book is a flower, with its exquisite perfume of parchment and dust. I have read only a little Santa Teresa and a little of San Juan de la Cruz. But if some day you honour me with your visit, you shall see a set of the *Summa* in several volumes, yes, quite a lot of volumes, and you, who are accustomed to study, you will have an excellent time with my books. I can't read; my thoughts get all mixed up and my head begins to turn round and round as soon as I begin to read anything deep. I am a poor insect of God, with less brains than sister ant who crawls at my feet."

The pious man looked at his feet, adding:

"They are expecting me at Bellavistas, Señor Maltrana. I have three *reales* in my pocket and a few leaflets for a certain widow. The poor woman is very sick and she has an army of children. You know where I live, Don Isidro. Let's see if you will honour me some day and pay my garden a visit. You've just got to ask for Señor Vicente, Don Vicente or Brother Vicente, just as you please, for they call me by all those names. . . . I hope you will prosper in your affairs. But I want to give you a piece of advice,

because I truly like you. Have faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, in His Holy Mother, and in our powerful patron Saint Joseph, and with Their help, believe me, everything will turn out just as you wish it, and if it isn't on this earth it will be in Heaven. . . . Good afternoon, Señor Maltrana."

He made his last speech in a hurry, as if it were an ejaculation learned by heart, taking off his hat for an instant, displaying his sharp, narrow, close-cropped head with its protruding ears. He then went away, waving his hand excitedly, as if the fervour awakened by the mention of his holy protectors could not be easily calmed.

For a long time Maltrana's eyes followed the interesting character who was the laughing stock of market maids and tavern loafers.

"And to think," said Isidro to himself, "that if he had been born two centuries ago, we should have had another Saint Vicente! . . ."

The young man soon forgot his queer friend. The girls were beginning to come out of the cap factory. Maltrana saw Feli stop at the gate and look at him out of the corner of her eye as if she were aware of his presence through having seen him from the factory windows.

The girl began to walk up the street, taking care not to mix with her fellow-workers and without stopping to wait for the chum with whom she went to the factory every morning.

Maltrana walked over to meet her. A shy salute was enough to make her smile and give up her intention, formed on seeing him, of being very serious. Her cheeks reddened at the remembrance of what had happened that afternoon during the Carnival.

Isidro began to speak to her, deeply moved. Ever since she had confessed her affection for him, he could not look at her with the same coldness he had displayed when she was merely his great friend Mosco's daughter and he had gone to eat the famous *cachuelas* without paying any attention to her looks.

The thought of his good luck, of the book entrusted to

him by the Marquis of Jimenez, which he regarded as a harbinger of wealth, gave him back his self-possession—that of a superior man.

" Feli, I was waiting for you because I want to talk to you, and I want to take my time about it. I have lots of important things to tell you."

The two crossed the street and, without knowing exactly what they were doing, left it and went into the fields, following the boundary of the third Deposito, towards San Martin Cemetery, which rose in the distance with its mass of cypresses.

The girl tried to stop. Where were they going in that direction ? But Isidro pushed gently along.

" Come along, girl ; you are going with me and you know that I respect you and am a gentleman. We can't walk along a street where everybody knows us ; we couldn't speak a single word then."

They kept on through the fields, following a path blackened by the soot from a neighbouring factory.

" Feli," continued the young man, " we had to have a talk. After that affair the other afternoon, at Caño Dorado, and all the things you told me . . . I simply had to talk to you. Your girl friends wouldn't let me. Besides, you were crying as if you were going to die."

" I never said a thing to you ! " exclaimed the girl, her cheeks afire. " And if I said anything to you, I don't remember it. I didn't know what I was talking about ; I was tipsy."

Isidro moved closer to Feli, pressing one side of his body against hers, feeling the elastic firmness of her flesh, the subtle warmth of her person through the thin shawl and flimsy skirt.

" Listen, Feli ; let's not be foolish. What is the use of all that shyness and coyness, as if we had met for the first time ? . . . I love you ; you love me ; we both love each other. That's simple enough ! . . . The only difference between us is that you, being a woman, are cleverer in love affairs than I, and that you found the truth first. I am a poor fool, and it has required your courage to tell me what

was what, as if I were a shy girl. Feli dear, I love you ! . . . What about yourself ? "

The girl did not answer by word of mouth. She lowered her eyes and gently moved her head in an affirmative sign.

Maltrana stuck his arm under the shawl and passed it through Feli's arm, squeezing it and drawing the girl closer to him. This dumb embrace, this invisible contact, was worth a world of words.

They walked along slowly, seeing nothing, as if their whole attention and the warmth of their lives were concentrated in their arms, which squeezed each other tremulously, their veins beating feverishly.

Maltrana fancied that he was walking in the midst of a fog that hid things from him and rendered the ground so elastic that his steps acquired a supernatural lightness.

A strange perfume, sweetly intoxicating, caressed his nostrils. It seemed impossible that a girl brought up in Carolinas amidst the refuse of the city could smell so sweetly. It came from her black hair, carelessly combed with graceful nonchalance ; it emanated from her beautiful body, from her fluttering skirts—a kind of supernatural essence that surely could not be bought in any perfume shop. Perhaps it was a delusion of his imagination, but the odour went to his head none the less as if it had been the strongest of wines. No woman who had ever passed close to Maltrana had smelt so sweetly. The young man was gradually learning what love and its sweet deceptions mean.

They saw a disagreeable old man coming towards them, a stick under his arm ; it was an octroi official taking a walk. Instinctively the couple separated, disentangling their arms.

This surprise brought them out of their sweet reverie. Maltrana, on whom sensations made less impression, came back, as he said, to reality.

The important piece of news he wanted to communicate to Feli was simply the work he was going to begin, the money that had unexpectedly arrived, making him crazy with joy, as if it were going to insure his comfort for the rest of his life.

" You are bringing me luck, Feli. I am going to be rich ; that is to say, we are going to be rich, the two of us."

And as she wanted to know what his wealth was exactly, Isidro had to explain himself a little hesitatingly.

" Rich right away, what you might really call rich, we won't be. They are going to give me only three thousand *reales*. But that *is* something, and more is bound to come. The main thing is to make a start, and I have begun already. . . . Do you know why I was blind, Feli ? Do you know why I never paid any attention to your most charming person ? Well, it was because up till now I have been a beggar, homeless, without money, even sleeping on a bed through charity, almost. How could I be thinking of a woman ? How could I have the nerve to ask her to share my wretchedness ? . . ."

Maltrana wanted to speak of the poverty in which he had lived until then, but the girl stopped him. He was poor, but what did that matter ? She knew it. Many a time had she noticed the ravenous appetite with which he ate in her father's house, clearly showing that he was half starved. But he was good, he was wise, and as far as she was concerned, he was the handsomest man in the world.

" Go on ! " exclaimed Isidro, thrusting his arm under the shawl again. " Are you trying to kid me ? "

" I'm telling the honest truth," the girl continued simply. " Yes, the handsomest man in Madrid. But, look here, sir, you mustn't get swell-headed about it."

She had fallen in love with him without knowing how. Her father spoke admiringly of the great men he had known when he was a printer. When Maltrana came to her house, she thought he was one of those great men who, seen from the poacher's house, appeared like demi-gods.

Mariposa spoke about her grandson to everybody, predicting that some day they would see him in the government ; Mosco recognized that Isidro had almost as much genius as that of his great idols ; Señor Manolo, the Federal, regretted, behind his back, that such an excellent young man would not enrol himself with the party. And Feli, imagination excited by the praise heaped upon Isidro,

looked at him with increasing admiration, and listened for hours and hours to things that she did not understand, but that, coming from his lips, sounded to her like heavenly music.

Now and then, there was a rent in the wall of incomprehensible words, a great window through which the girl admired a new sky, another sun, a supernatural world inhabited only by beings like Isidro. When Maltrana recited verses at the end of his lunches with Mosco ; when he spoke of those great writers who live in foreign countries as if they were princes, poor Feli felt her heart throbbing, her legs almost gave way under her, and her eyes filled with tears, as if she were in the presence of a new religion.

She began to pass her nights in an endless dream, seeing him, always him, like an angel, astonishing mere mortals with his greatness, and the queerest thing was that next day, when she saw him in the flesh, she found him, not as he really was, but embellished with the same grandeur as in the nocturnal vision.

" You too ! " exclaimed Maltrana. " You also dream. . . ."

Feli then spoke very sadly of the doubts that had assailed her. Isidro was far too high to come down to her level, poor daughter of a poacher who lived among the miserable rag-pickers. Whenever he came, pale with hunger, to have lunch with Mosco, she felt indescribably happy. She did her best to cook well, concentrating all her attention on the stewing of the rabbits. She blessed the privations of his bohemian life as a providential boon that brought her closer to him and gave her new hopes. But then, a long time passed without seeing him. He was in Madrid . . . in Madrid ! And the girl repeated the name with rage, as if it evoked an unknown world, full of temptations. Isidro must have had lots of handsome women there ; he surely must have been a great friend of the actresses, like all men who write for papers. How many nights she had spent groaning with despair, thinking that all her dreams were vain ! . . .

The innocent Feli said all that, still trembling with fear, as if she were not sure of possessing Isidro's affection, as if

afraid that he would be taken away from her by those temptations she magnified to fantastic proportions. Maltrana laughed at the girl's simplicity. Candid and credulous soul! . . . If she only knew the reality of life! . . . Fancy thinking him among actresses and high *cocottes*, having a good time, when he was dying with hunger and longing for the comforting mess they gave him at the editorial rooms! Fancy him favoured and sought after by women, when even the men laughed at the poor physique of wretched Homer and tormented him with their jokes! . . .

Without her knowing it, the girl's words had a cruel irony in them. Maltrana went on laughing at Feli's naiveté until the girl, making an angry grimace, said to him:

"There must be an end to your escapades, eh? You must love me only; you've got to pay no attention whatever to those high-falutin ladies. You must know, my dear sir, that I am very jealous, and that if you play me any tricks, you'll pay me for them . . . you bet you'll pay for them . . . you big rascal!"

They had reached the road that goes from Madrid to the patriarchal church of San Martin, along which in the afternoons the suburban beggars who go to receive free soup at the asylum of San Bernardino pass.

The couple arrived at the esplanade in front of the church. Their steps, crunching the sand, sounded imposingly in the silence. Now and then one could hear the screeching of a bird, and the foliage was shaken by invisible flutterings.

Feli, who had always seen the cemetery from a distance, felt very uneasy at finding herself so close to it. Through the branches of the trees and the irons of the railings, the white marble of the grave-stones could be seen. The girl's arm trembled with fear and squeezed that of her sweetheart.

"Don't be foolish!" exclaimed Maltrana. "This is only a garden! The last person they buried here was my benefactress, and before that, there hadn't been a funeral for years and years. . . . This is very pretty; it makes you think of love rather than of death."

From the esplanade the girl looked at the entrance to the cemetery ; two pink-coloured small buildings joined by a colonnade of the same cheerful hue. In one building there was the chapel, closed for many years, with an iron steeple on the roof, from which hung a couple of rust-covered bells. The other building was the keeper's home, and on the sill of an arched window, a row of flower-pots stood under a gaily-coloured curtain fluttering in the breeze.

A railing closed the colonnade, and through its irons the cemetery appeared like a luxuriant garden. Tall and elegant cypresses lined the avenues ; in the space between them beautiful high rose bushes were grouped. Creeping plants twined their green undulations around the cloister columns, reaching the top of the horse-shoe arches. The mausoleums, the lying statues, the marble angels among the closely planted flower-beds, seemed like garden statuary.

Whenever Maltrana contemplated this cemetery, with the rounded cupolas of its pavilions, its columns and the Hellenic vegetation of its tall cypresses, he thought of one of those classic acropolises that constituted a fortress, a sanctuary and a promenade at the same time.

The sweet peace of the place, disturbed now and then by the rustling of the foliage and the chirping of birds, allayed Feli's fears.

" Let's go in," said her sweetheart. " This is a cemetery of romance ; a garden unlike any other in Madrid."

The loving couple felt attracted by the poetic silence of that forgotten corner.

In the colonnade they saw an old woman knitting stockings, and beside her, a big man who fixed his inquisitorial eyes on the couple.

" Are you coming here about some relative ? "

Maltrana answered with the assurance of a man who is telling the truth :

" Most of my family are here."

The keeper did not seem satisfied.

" Are you not coming to paint ? Because if you want to paint, you must have a permit," he said.

Isidro smiled, throwing back his coat. To paint !

What a funny question! Where could he hide the colours and the palette? . . .

The young couple, after a grunt of consent from the keeper, entered the cemetery, commenting on the keeper's queer questions with guffaws that enlivened the funereal silence.

Maltrana wanted Feli to see his benefactress's grave, and the couple followed the central avenue, descending a tunnelled staircase that brought them to an adjoining yard. From the rectangle formed by the yard, much lower than the centre of the cemetery, they could see neither trees nor flower-beds. The ground was entirely occupied by Death: the graves were huddled together between the galleries of the cloister.

The corner was beautified by the poetic desolation. The big sepulchral slabs were bent by time and rain; their inscriptions blurred; the weeds growing between pushed them out of place, breaking the alignment by the vital impulse of their roots.

The wreaths, hanging from rusty iron crosses, had lost their flowers, their gilt house-leeks; they were mere rings of rotten black straw that sheltered among their wisps a swarm of insects.

The steps of the two lovers resounded in the hollow spaces which enclosed the human bones. Everywhere, in the ground, in the walls, the same sensation of hollowness, the endless repetition of the least sound, the sonorous emptiness of Death.

Maltrana stopped in front of a niche. There lay his good angel, the one who, to him, was above all "the lady." With deep emotion he remembered what the kind old lady used to say to him when she promised to get him a wife who would make him happy. Madame his partner was there; she had come to pay her respects to his "lady," and to thank her for all she had done for him. Feli was not rich, perhaps she was not an extra good Christian, as his benefactress would have liked her to be; but she would embellish his life, she would give him fortitude to follow the thorny path in which he had been abandoned by the protecting hand, paralysed by Death.

When they left the funereal courtyard, the central avenue of the cemetery seemed to them handsomer than ever. The garden, with its melancholy charm, banished all idea of death. It was entirely different from the yards near-by stocked full of corpses. Its thinly scattered tombs seemed like ornaments intended to break up the green monotony of the vegetation. They were the graves of rich people, of privileged persons who, even after death, seemed to preserve the quiet composure of Fortune's favourites. Names of former ministers of the Crown, of generals, of duchesses famous for their beauty, glittered on the sides of those enormous marble toys.

The first butterflies of the season fluttered over the rose-bushes, whose dried twigs, chilled by the winter cold, were beginning to swell with tender buds. Insects buzzed in the golden atmosphere of the afternoon ; the earth cracked to let through a wild vegetation, a green jungle like the luxuriant hair of spring slowly thrusting her head from her wintry prison. The ants busied themselves along the ground, raising pyramids near the openings of their burrows, crossing the stone paths in black rosaries to perform epic feats under the grass—combats, conquests and other herculean tasks. From cypress to cypress blackbirds flew, tearing the silence by the whistling of their wings through the air. There were magpies and blackbirds hidden in the majestic thickets which constituted their only shelter among the barren hills.

Three children in white dresses, with angel-like rosy, puffed-up cheeks, three little children belonging to the keeper, or to some neighbouring family, played, crouching on the grass, shoving sticks into the ant-hills and throwing stones at the birds who hardly moved their wings. Feli looked at them with loving eyes ; she felt a strong desire to clasp them in her arms, to smother them with kisses on their pink dirty mouths, as if they had been the image of triumphant life invading the domain of forgetfulness.

Maltrana, under the influence of the sweet and melancholy surroundings, uttered his thoughts. He liked the cemetery of San Martin, with its murmuring vegetation,

like an abandoned garden, because it presented the beauty of Death such as he had conceived it.

Death was not a skeleton of mocking laughter and grotesque capers such as the art of the Middle Ages, in its horror of the flesh, had represented her. She was a great lady of sad beauty, pale, intensely pale, with a dull-coloured skin that seemed to absorb life from the air, leaving on its surface neither lustre nor sap, with intense, frigid, deep black eyes that gathered light from space without reflecting the least ray. She was a matron of powerful hips in whose womb life surged again, and of robust luminous breasts always swollen with thick bitter milk. Remembrance was at one of her breasts, groaning as it tasted the bitter liquid ; at the other, Forgetfulness sucked with its eyes closed, longing for sleep. As she went by, birds became silent, flowers withered, animate beings fell to the ground and silence reigned. Her feet, hidden under her crêpe tunic, shook the earth, as if they had been shod with iron buskins. But hardly had she gone by when everything revived at her back, almost at the very fringe of her funereal veils ; the flowers came to life with renewed strength, the birds trilled and from the dust where the old, the useless and the weak had fallen, they rose up again transfigured by youth. She was the fertilizer of life, the sickle that mows down the hay so that it may grow again with greater strength. Maltrana knew her ; he had seen her pass before his eyes in all her melancholy splendour, evoked by the sublimest of artistic exaltations. Wagner had brought her forth from the mists of mystery, making her march to the sound of grave melodies that were like an echo of human sorrow. Twice had Maltrana seen her, as he closed his eyes, with her pale skin, her cold black eyes which shone inwardly, her hips of the eternal creatress, and her bitter breasts : when the savage Sigmund speaks to the Valkyrie who foretells him his death, and when the despairing Isolde twists herself with pain and tears her hair, dishevelled by the sea-breeze, before the body of Tristan.

It was she, the real, the only one, she who inspires fear and consolation, the sad beauty who never loses her youth,

the pale mistress of the world, the beauty who is always punctual at the assignation with a kiss of forgetfulness and peace, with the spasms of insensibility and annihilation.

Feli listened to her sweetheart, her eyes dilated with astonishment, trying to understand him.

"What a lot you know, Isidro!" she murmured, caressing him with a look. "That's why I love you so much; because you say so many pretty things."

Maltrana smiled at the girl's naïveté at the same time feeling flattered by her admiration. He almost repented of what he had said. All foolish talk. He had spoken to her as if she had been one of his pals whom he wanted to perturb with his paradoxes.

They took each other by the arm again, and Maltrana led the girl to a gallery of niches in the lowest part of the cemetery.

"I want to show you how geniuses end, how those who in life had flatterers and admirers rest. . . . Look."

After a hurried search with his eyes, he pointed out to her a niche, the most miserable of the lot, its mouth hardly covered by a piece of oilcloth, the corners of which had become detached, a black rag with yellowish blurred letters. Feli read with great difficulty: "Aparisi y Guijarro."

"This gentleman was famous when he was alive," continued Isidro. "He made speeches in Congress which lasted through several sittings. Priests, pious people and women all over Spain waited impatiently for the newspapers in order to read his speeches. And now, look at him; any inn-keeper has a better lodging after death. . . . He was a poet, a dreamer, and poets, I don't know why, have very bad luck in politics. . . . I don't believe in him, but I pity and defend him through *esprit de corps*. This neglect somewhat consoles us, poor wretches who work without hope among the poor, among the mob."

Maltrana continued in wrathful tones. Well might that tribune's king improve his tomb a little; well might the representatives of tradition remember a little the great artist who had incited them with his oratorical hymns. It was nothing short of infamous mockery to mention his name

constantly as the glory and banner of the pretender's party, while his remains lay in a corner without the least sign of homage, as if they were those of a man who had passed quietly and friendless through life.

Feli spelled the pencilled inscriptions that blackened the plaster around the niche—ingenuous and senseless verses in honour of the " Spanish Cicero," the " defender of the faith and traditions ; " testimonials of the enthusiasm of humble priests who, when they came to Madrid, did not want to return to their villages without visiting the tomb of their great man. The fallen piece of oil-cloth seemed to laugh, with its creases, at the extravagant praise, which sounded very hollow in such neglect.

Maltrana examined the signatures.

" They all belong to the mob . . . poor priests, deluded guerilla soldiers—low people, but those with hearts."

That dreamer from the East Coast of Spain, that misguided artist, also had a heart, and therefore, he was resting in the utmost neglect.

" He was poor and he defended the rich," continued Maltrana ; " he was a plebeian and he wanted to bring back the past with its class privileges ; he had the independent and somewhat rebellious temperament of his countrymen and he wished for absolutism. Those whom he defended do not remember him, and perhaps in this they follow their instinct, which never deceives. He lived for them but he did not belong to them."

The couple abandoned the corner and returned to the central avenue which ended in an open building, a kind of apsis occupying the rear of the cemetery, with a half-cupola and walls in the shape of a semicircle. In the walls were large recesses with rich funereal urns. The segments of the vault were decorated with frescoes representing the resurrection of Jesus. Through the panes of the great door, at the back, could be seen the hill opposite, and a group of poplars between two red houses in the bottom of the glen. Over this door, there was a half-horse-shoe window of coloured panes through which the light of the afternoon sun filtered, flooding the walls, the graves, the floor, with the

polychromous shades of the rainbow. The fantastic light seemed to lend life to the figures of the vault, animating them with divine splendours.

" How pretty ! " murmured the girl.

That light brightened the eyes and effaced from the mind all thought of what the place really was. The apsis seemed to Feli like a dance hall, lighted with coloured lamps; she thought that all the dead, handsomely dressed, smiling, inspiring no fear, were going to present themselves and take part in a festival. The birds chirped in the garden next to it or fluttered under the arcades as if attracted by the beautiful illumination.

The class of people buried in that part of the cemetery suggested pictures of luxury, pleasure and festivals. They were duchesses famous for their beauty, court ladies who had died in the prime of life, women who had been society queens and adored belles. The names, shining in gilt letters on the milky whiteness of the marble, suggested elegant entertainments, amorous tête-à-têtes, luxurious boudoirs reeking with sweet perfumes and adorned with costly flowers.

As if feeling the effect of the love and voluptuousness recalled by the names of the illustrious ladies, Maltrana fixed his eyes on Feli, who wonderingly contemplated the magnificent tombs. Placing one arm around her waist, he drew her close to him and kissed her where he could, between the pink lobe of one ear and the swarthy neck ; a kiss that turned her skin to gooseflesh and made her shiver at the contact with his lips.

The girl freed herself with a rough push.

" Isidro ! " she exclaimed shamefacedly, " Isidro ! . . ."

And she lowered her head sadly, as if pained by her lover's audacity. She then blamed herself, without reproaching him in the least. It was all her own fault ; she ought to have avoided that lonely spot ; she ought to have refused to go into the cemetery with Isidro who, no doubt, was accustomed to the greatest familiarities with his shameless lady friends in Madrid. . . . Fancy kissing her ! . . . And in that place, too ! . . .

She looked around, as if expecting the graves to open up and the dead rise, shocked at such profanation.

Maltrana smiled. Foolish girl! What was she afraid of? That place was as good as any other; better even, for its silent poetry of an abandoned garden was conducive to love. All they were doing was to repeat the eternal hymn of life. It had been sung before by those very people who had been happy and now slept in their marmoreal shrouds. The only true thing in life is love. If the dead could remember the past, the remembrance of their hours of love would console them in their eternal night. Those aristocratic ladies, hiding behind the stones that proclaimed their titles, their decorations, and their charity, had not spent their whole life with their noble diadems on their heads and their ribbons on their breasts, posing as charitable persons. They had been women, women proud of their beauty, and apt to exhibit their charms as if they were granting a queenly favour.

Isidro, with shameless fancy, imagined them in the abandonment of their bedrooms, displaying mysteries of mother-of-pearl and roses through their foamy laces, clasping the beloved man in the supreme paroxysm of desire, forgetting all the vanities of life and concentrating their whole existence on the violent sensual embrace. That personage, lying on his sarcophagus with the severe toga of the man who passes judgment on his fellow beings, probably had not always had the frowning and austere mien with which the sculptor represented him. At times, the man must have vanquished the personage, and sneaking away like a young blade, throwing away his imposing mask, he must have sought a ray of happiness in some mysterious corner, far away from his family, abominating its harsh and sour morality. The dead had known happiness a long time before them; now it was their own turn and they should take advantage of their good luck.

"Feli, my life!" exclaimed Maltrana with vehement exaggeration. "Laugh at the dead; they don't hate us; they envy us. Shout with me: Long live Love! . . ."

"No; let's get away from here," murmured the girl.

" We'll talk outside, and I'll shout anything you want me to. Fancy making love for the first time in a cemetery ! . . . This will bring us bad luck ; we'll end sadly. Let's get out of here, Isidro."

She tried to pull him away, impelled by a childish terror, and the young man followed her. But as they were passing under the arch at the entrance to the apsis, Isidro stopped her and let out an exclamation of astonishment.

The light from the coloured window enveloped Feli—a veil of palpitating colours that covered her from head to toe, making her body quiver, as if composed of the colours of the rainbow.

" How lovely ! " exclaimed Maltrana ecstatically. " If you could only see yourself ! . . . Your skirt is green and your bosom blue. Your mouth is orange ; one cheek is violet and the other amber. It looks as if you had pinks on your brow."

Feli stood motionless, smiling with feminine complacency, happy because her lover found her so pretty. She felt the caress of the sunbeam and half closed her eyes, blinded by the wave of hues that palpitated on her clothes and her flesh. The pleasure of her lover's admiration banished from her mind the fear of the cemetery which she forgot as easily as women forget their terror when they feel themselves flattered in their vanity.

Suddenly, Feli felt something besides the warm contact of the light. Her sweetheart was embracing her again with increased strength, and she stood still, offering no resistance.

" Let me kiss this golden yellow. . . . Now the purple . . . now the blue . . . the rose of your brow . . . the heliotrope of your lips . . . the violets of your eyes."

The kisses fell upon her like sonorous rain—smacks of passion made more audible by the echo of the cemetery.

Feli squirmed in his arms, trying to free herself. As she moved, the colours changed places, passing from one side to the other of her adorable body. All the shades of the light passed through her mouth. Maltrana did not want to let one go ; he wanted to taste them all amidst the glory of lights.

Feliciana closed her eyes, shivering under the flood of kisses, and her virginal sensitiveness vibrated in the clasp of the masculine arms. She felt ready to faint, as if her trembling legs could not hold her up any longer, and she murmured between sweet sighs :

"That's enough . . . leave me alone. . . . You are choking me. . . . Leave me alone or I'll yell. . . . Assassin. . . ."

At last managing to free herself, she adjusted her shawl and patted down her hair, tousled by the virile embraces, and fixed her eyes on her sweetheart with a look in which reproach and gratitude were mixed.

" You'll never catch me again. . . . What a time you've had with that game of colours ! . . . Let's go, or I'll quarrel with you." She started to run towards the exit, as if she wanted to avoid Maltrana's explanations, and the young man followed. Near the railing, they retarded their pace and walked together, with solemn faces, as if they came away very sad from their visit to the graves.

Without saying a word, they passed before the keeper who had received them with such strange questions, but as they went away, Feli turned her head to have a look at him and burst into a childish guffaw. Isidro guessed his sweetheart's thought : he recalled the hostile mien with which the keeper had asked them if they came there to paint.

" The fellow had a premonition of what would happen," said Maltrana joyfully. " Had he been sure, he probably would have asked for a share of the colours."

The remembrance of the kisses drew them together ; they linked arms and walked on together, their eyes, still burning with passion, riveted on each other.

Feli forgot her anger. When they were in the open field, where her lover could not give way to any more affectionate outbursts, she abandoned herself to him, leaning against him, caressing him with her breath, looking at him so closely that Maltrana could feel the fire of her burning eyes.

The afternoon was coming to a close. The sun was setting, and on the sky, of a soft purple tint, the moon

floated like a pale little cloud somewhat blurred by the light of the dying day.

The two lovers followed the road along the third Deposito, their feet crunching the sooty gravel that blackened the ground. Ragged women with sleeping children in their arms passed towards Madrid; old women, wrinkled and dark like witches, with pots to receive the soup from San Bernardino.

The unhappy wretches, with true feminine instinct, scented love as they went by the young couple and begged for alms. Isidro prodigally distributed his money, accompanying his gift with immoral advice that made Feli laugh. They should not buy bread; his money should be spent to get some wine, to get beastly drunk. The world should get drunk and jump with joy; it should reflect the happiness that overflowed his soul at finding himself loved by Feli.

They were also looking for an eating house, some pretty place where they could eat and drink and accompanied by a piano, take a couple of turns at a waltz.

Long live Life! Maltrana, remembering his creed of other days, repeated to his sweetheart that Life is joy, that it has a Hellenic sense, that pain, which seems endless, is nothing but a fleeting accident, an appetizer for happiness after which one has a banquet of the joys of existence.

A man passed with a basket or oranges, and as Isidro caught a greedy look from his sweetheart, made him stop. He wanted the very best in the basket! Feli liked oranges; she had not tasted any that year and he was capable of spreading at her feet, like a golden carpet, the whole Valencian crop.

Feliciana wanted to take only one, the most beautiful of the lot, and the couple continued on their way while she played with the golden ball as if she were a child, throwing it up in the air and catching it with her hands. She finally opened a hole in the orange and began to suck its juice, squeezing it between her fingers. An amber jet flowed down her lips to the gracefully rounded chin, sweetening her skin. Isidro wanted to drink it and his lips once more touched those of Feli.

" Again ! " exclaimed the girl, throwing back her head, half smiling, half angry. " You blackguard ! . . . Don't you know that people can see us ? . . ."

She then laughed at Isidro's downhearted expression as he lowered his head like a child in a huff. With loving gracefulness she pushed the orange against his mouth.

" There, take it and don't cry. . . . There's where I have placed my lips ; suck, and don't let us have any more kissing nonsense. I'll have to treat you as a bad little boy. . . . Spank, spank . . . naughty, naughty boy."

And with her soft white hand, a lady's hand that astonished the whole Carolinas district, she lovingly tapped the young man's face.

At nightfall, they entered a restaurant in the dale of Amaniel. The girl half-heartedly mentioned that she should be going home, but Isidro protested. Her father would not worry over a little thing like that ; he would think that she was, as on other occasions, at a friend's house in Bellavistas. Perhaps at that very hour he was at the Ventorro de la Latas, preparing to start for El Pardo.

Some Chinese lanterns diffused their brilliance throughout the restaurant. The building had been constructed out of old trams, just like those in the Carolinas district. The benches, of reversible backs, came from an open car ; the partitions were made with window shutters. Near the ceiling, by way of a frieze, was a heterogeneous collection of yellowish photographs, views of Havana and of the boulevards of Paris and Vienna by the side of pictures of Fuente de la Teja and of the Viaduct. Heads of angels, gaudily gilded and painted, remnants from the woodwork of some pretentious store, appeared to support the roof-beams.

Isidro, who saw everything in rosy hues, admired the furnishings of the restaurant. Very pretty indeed ! Very original ! That was what you call modern art.

The proprietor, very much pleased by the praises of a gentleman who seemed to be a connoisseur, answered modestly :

" Just a little taste, and nothing more. Even at that, it

has cost me a pile of money. . . . What are you going to have ? "

Isidro would have liked the whole restaurant for Feli. But she had no appetite, she did not want anything ; and finally, so as not to disappoint him, she asked for a bottle of beer.

Other couples occupied the different corners silently, in intimate contact under the table and devouring each other with their eyes. Maltrana thought he was in a new world, in a better world than he had known until then. Long live the joy of life ! . . . And long live Hellenism !

From behind a clump of plants, as if it had been a bursting rocket, sounded a barrel-organ accompanied by a bell. Isidro admiringly looked at the boy with the round cap, neckerchief and wide trousers, like an odalisque, who was turning the handle of the instrument. How clever he was ! What a great musician ! Never had Maltrana felt such a deep impression before ; not even in the best concerts. That waltz, which seemed offhand to have been composed for a servants' dance, was a sublime piece of music ; the work, perhaps, of some unknown genius. Isidro did not hesitate in his statements ; that waltz was as magnificent as the Ninth Symphony.

" Come on, Feli ; let us take two or three turns. Let us see how you can show off that elegant figure of yours."

Neither of them knew how to dance. As a student, Isidro had taken a few lessons with his lady friends in the cafés near the University. Feliciana had danced with her girl friends, and guided by her feminine instinct, she followed the rhythm of the music better, leading her partner.

What cared they whether they danced well or not, or whether the customers in the restaurant laughed at them ! . . . The important thing was that they were in each other's arms, their bodies closely touching from their breasts to their knees, transmitting their souls from one to the other with the warmth of their bodies, their breaths mingling. They felt indescribably happy as if the few drops of beer they had drunk contained all the intoxications of the earth. They refrained from kissing through a remnant

of shyness, through fear of the people, but their parched lips moistened now and again by their tongues, seemed to attract each other through the short distance that separated them.

When they left the restaurant, they walked in silence with vacillating steps through the deserted fields. They stopped in the neighbourhood of the Little Canal. The moon reflected its good-natured face on the blue crystal of the water that flowed silently by.

The couple fled from the light. They wanted to take a rest ; they had no strength to continue on their way and they stopped close to an excavation, hiding themselves in the shadow of the big mass of earth.

Several smacks and some feeble expressions of protest sounded in the dark.

Feli spoke very low, in a tearful voice.

" Swear that you will never abandon me. That you will love me always . . . that you don't despise me because I am weak with you . . . because I love you."

Isidro swore to everything without speaking ; he swore to everything with his restless hands, with his caressing lips, with the virile embrace that vanquished and enslaved between his arms that simple and primitive soul yearning for an ideal.

CHAPTER VI

ONE Sunday morning Isidro and Feli went down to the Rastro.

On the previous afternoon, the young man had spoken in determined tones.

" Feli, it must be done not later than to-morrow. It is about time we were living together. I am sick and tired of wandering through the fields like gypsies. I am working for you and we have a right to build our own nest."

Feliciana hesitated for a moment. What about her father ? . . . But one look from Isidro was enough to overcome her resistance. She was in the full intoxication of love, with no other will than to adore and follow him. She would go with him, with him ! even if she had to renounce all her past.

Maltrana had money and was becoming a bourgeois, as he ironically said when he spoke of his wealth. He wanted to have a home of his own, he wanted to live under his own roof, to have a shelter where he could shut himself up and work, comforted by the loving warmth of a woman.

His work, *True Socialism,* was nearly finished. He had worked assiduously on it, writing during the day at the National Library or the Atheneum, wherever he could find silence and books. The work progressed rapidly, and he did not forget the recommendations of the Marquis of Jimenez, great lover of erudition. Each page had at its foot a goodly foundation of small, close type, mentioning authors of all countries, books of all literatures, and even quoting whole passages in several languages.

He made no assertion, no matter how simple, without accompanying it with the testimony of half a dozen authorities. The author proceeded slowly, hesitatingly, but

when he set his foot down, it was on solid ground, like a man who is tutored and guided by the wisest men in the world.

Erudition rushed like a torrent through the lower portion of the book. Maltrana fed it with an ease that knew no scruples. When he wanted to clinch an argument with quotations from other authors and did not have them ready at hand, he made use of the illustrious Murfinos, of the Norwegian Academy, of Max Stradivarius, famous professor at the University of Goettingen and other sociologists not less fantastical, invented by him to astonish his client. After all, he was not going to sign the work. The Marquis of Jimenez received a chapter every other day, and as he copied it in his own handwriting (in spite of his innumerable affairs) he admired the learning of the young man.

"This is going to create a sensation," he thought. "Perhaps it is too good. Perhaps I ought to give it a little of my personal style."

And in order to impart to the work a little of his "own style," he shifted about a few commas or changed the order of some words; he wrote "illustrious" where Maltrana had put "famous," or vice versa. A heavy task for him. . . . And yet there would be people who, when the book appeared, would doubt whether it was his own work! . . .

Maltrana, forced to work during the day, had given up the hovel in Artistas Street, for the only bed there was occupied during the night by Señor José and his son. The young man slept in Madrid, temporarily in the room of a fellow Bohemian. He hated to wander with Feli every afternoon through the fields that surround Cuatro Caminos and have to take her home when night fell.

Although Mosco did not pay much attention to his daughter's doings, he was beginning to show a little concern at her delay in coming home from the factory, excusing herself with extraordinary tasks that had kept her longer at her work.

Spring was beautifying the arid surroundings of Madrid. The fields of barley and wheat covered the neighbouring hills with green velvet. In the dales, the almond trees assumed their jewellery of blossoms; some white, with the

whiteness of mother-of-pearl ; others pink—the colour of a woman's flesh. The lilac blossoms hung in bunches from the high branches. Insects buzzed, intoxicated with warmth and life ; birds fluttered, animating the foliage with tremors and sighs ; crickets screeched, hiding in the grass. The fields decked themselves with a beautiful cloak to hide under it the caresses of love, to lull lovers with the perfumes and charms of their exuberant life.

Feli and Isidro were attracted every afternoon by a road lined with almond trees, close to the Bishop's Garden. Their arms around each other's waists, they walked under the trees which spread over their heads a vault of flowers. Their red, inflamed petals seemed to open up to greet them.

"Look at them!" exclaimed Feli, "they are little mouths smiling at us, wanting to speak to us."

Maltrana accepted the girl's naïve interpretation. Yes, they were flowery mouths that opened to tell Feli that she was very pretty.

"And I," he continued very gravely, "fully subscribe to the wise opinion of this flowery meeting."

The afternoon breeze shook the trees and a shower of petals fell over Feli, covering her hair.

They sat down on the turf-covered banks, and while conversing pulled the wild daisies that grew within reach of their hands. Thus they waited the gloaming and the night shadows found them very often in the vicinity of the silent and deep canal, that had witnessed without a murmur and in complicity with the good-natured moon, their communion of love.

Feli lived in a sweet somnolence, absorbed in her happiness, somewhat astonished that the world should have, hidden away, so many pleasures. Everything seemed good to her ; she abandoned herself with sublime immodesty ; she felt capable of flying into Isidro's arms right in the middle of Cuatro Caminos with the same passion that she would have displayed in a secluded spot.

Maltrana was more exacting and hard to please. The fields were very pretty in spring, with their poetic atmosphere and those twilights that were the best in the world!

But they could not go on like that all their lives, wandering from place to place, looking for a lonely corner, fleeing from people and shivering with terror at the least noise. Besides, he was thinking of Mosco who might surprise them some day, informed by some busybody of what was going on. He did not mention his terrible friend by name, but those idyllic meetings in the open fields, so near Carolinas, seemed to him rather dangerous and indefensible.

Isidro was seized by the audacious resolution of weak wills. His fear of Mosco rendered him more daring and made him face danger once again. . . . Did Feli really love him ? Very well then, she should follow him ; they should live together, forgetting everything that was not love.

With no emotion whatever, urged by the egotism of passion, they spoke of abandoning the father and the friend.

Maltrana had two thousand *reales*, a fortune, for he had never seen so much money before. They would live in the centre of Madrid, where nobody would know them. They would be husband and wife to these people who understand love only with documents and seals. Later on, if they had any children, they would think of getting married. Feliciana, defeated in her last scruples, consented to all her lover's plans. She also wanted a new life : to be near Isidro always, never to return to the rag-picker's district which now appeared to her dirtier and gloomier than ever.

Maltrana discussed at length with Feli the details of their future home.

" We'll have to be practical," he said. " We must be very bourgeois . . . ."

And Feli replied very seriously :

" You'll see how saving I'll be and how well we'll live."

Isidro, in his desire to be practical, looked for a house at the other end of Madrid, where no one could find them after the scandal following their elopement. But rents were so high ! . . .

One Saturday he told Feli that he had made up his mind. He had got a house, and the next day they would go to live in it. He had met brother Vicente, the holy madman who distributed Catholic leaflets and did mission work in

the suburbs. He lived in the vicinity of Cebada Square. Isidro had gone up to his flat, a fourth floor, right under the roof, but with more rooms than were necessary for brother Vicente and the old volumes of his library. He was a good, gentle, tolerant man, with no other defect than his holy mania. He had had several working people in his flat, but had finally dismissed them all on account of the gossiping of the women and the drunkenness of the men. He did not want any more tenants, but Señor Maltrana was a courteous, well-educated man, who listened to him in silence, without making jokes at his expense. When the young man told him that he was married, Vicente accepted them as his tenants with pleasure.

Maltrana explained to Feli the advantages of their future home. They would live at the other end of Madrid, where only a detective could find them. They would pay merely three *duros* rent, for the holy man, who occupied with his pile of books the two best rooms, would look after the rest. They would have the kitchen, never used by Señor Vicente because of his fasts and the bird-like diet he followed, a large room where Maltrana himself would write, and from the windows of which all the roofs in Madrid could be seen, and another room which they would use as a bedroom. . . . Really, a palace which they were going to beautify with their love, they who had wandered through the fields like the lovers of ancient idyls.

All they had to do was to furnish the house, and they set to it with the enthusiasm of a novelty, tremendously pleased by their task, which was very bourgeois, according to Maltrana.

Feli abandoned forever her father's house and the Carolinas district. Mosco was sleeping that morning, exhausted by the expedition of the previous night. The girl felt no remorse at leaving the place where she had passed her life ; she did not hesitate a second but fled without a pang. Her only concern was not to be late, for Isidro was waiting for her at the Bilbao crossways.

At eleven o'clock, they entered the Square of El Rastro. Feliciana hardly knew that part of Madrid. Used to the

semi-rural life of Tetuan, she was somewhat frightened at being pushed by the crowd in Cebada Square.

The vendors, with a couple of lemons or some bunches of parsley in their hands, advertised their goods at the top of their voices. In Ruda Street, she had to hang on to Maltrana's arm in order to walk on the slippery asphalt pavement covered with green leaves, wet straw and fish scales. The large baskets of the hawkers occupied the middle of the street ; the shops spread their removable counters over the pavements.

When they arrived at the Square of El Rastro, the young woman rested a little, leaning against the railing of the monument to the soldier of Cascorro.

Maltrana pondered a moment, then thrust his hands into his vest pockets and pulled out two twenty-five *peseta*-notes and a bunch of silver.

" Here, kid, you keep the money. I know myself ; if I carry it, I'll spend it in knick-knacks before we buy our furniture."

Feliciana was very pleased at his prudent resolution, and wrapped up the little fortune in her handkerchief, squeezing it in both hands with the air of an economical woman ready to defend her money.

They then descended the hill amidst the infernal hubbub of El Rastro.

Before them the Ribera de Curtidores opened, with such a sharp incline that the roofs of the houses at one end were on the same level as the street at the other. Over the roofs of the Americas, Feli saw the undulating yellowish hills of the Castilian plain, softly swollen, perfectly discernible in the dry atmosphere that shortens distances.

As they descended the Ribera de Curtidores, the landscape narrowed, sinking until it hid behind the shops at the bottom of the street. On both sides of the street, under white linen awnings or dark canvas coverings, were the stalls of the traditional second-hand dealers who live the year round in El Rastro.

On the floor, lying on old pieces of canvas, the most heterogeneous objects were scattered : swords with velvet

sheaths that had done duty in some threatre, Cuban *machetes*, National Guard sabres, chipped china, broken salt cellars, porcelain vases patched with coarse metal clamps, old lithographs, covered with dusty glass, representing the misfortunes of Atala or the exploits of Herman Cortes, paint-smeared canvases where in the black background could be seen a red stroke, representing a leg, and a yellow stain, which was meant for a bald head.

The sticks that supported the awnings were joined by ropes from which hung soldiers' uniforms, old frock coats, worn out trousers, voile overskirts that had been fashionable thirty years before, skirts that smelled of the dampness and dust gathered in some attic.

Other stalls displayed new goods, and the vendors, instead of remaining still, with Moorish passivity, waiting for the customer's inquiry, kept moving constantly, advertising the cheapness of their merchandise. They were the remnants of elegance, the waste of feminine caprice : glass beads that were no longer used for dresses, garlands of flowers for hats, yellowish laces, all rendered old by fashion before they could be used. In other stalls there were old telescopes, cornets, cartridge belts of wrinkly leather, riding saddles, and pecking through some greasy old clothes, as if they were the image of dying spring, the pale roses embroidered on a chasuble.

Through the middle of the street the hawkers with large baskets full of hardware perambulated, advertising their goods at one *reale* apiece, from a candlestick to a brush or a set of combs. Sturdy fellows of powerful lungs contorted themselves, as if they were epileptics, in order to attract customers, running around their stalls, displaying their wares and giving them to certain associates who pretended to be buyers so as to stimulate the sluggish customers.

" Here ! Here's the man who has gone crazy and is giving things away ! " shouted one in a thunderous voice.

" Come on ! Take them away ! " roared another. "Get busy ! Get busy ! "

Amid the gloomy and sordid trash accumulated in the stalls, a light that blinded the passers-by suddenly shone.

It was a display of brass-ware carefully polished for the Sunday sale : braziers of gilt cupolas, mortars, kitchen pots, and among them a great quantity of Biscayan revolvers, so cheap that one trembled for the fate of those who might attempt to fire them.

Before buying any other furniture, Feli and her lover wanted to get a bed, and they hesitatingly stopped when they saw so many of them in the stalls and in the stores, iron, wood, some folded, some spread out with their spring mattresses. The girl stood astonished at such a quantity. She did not know what to do and could not make up her mind, for she liked several equally well.

Maltrana made her move on. They had a lot to see yet ; they were only at the entrance of El Rastro. Lower down in the Americas, he had friends, relatives, and they would tell him what would be the best things to buy.

In the lower part of the Ribera, was a mob of young fellows who offered for sale " the fine modern bottles of cut glass . . . at one *reale* each." A swarm of women surrounded some females who offered " magnificent Scotch linen stockings at three *reales* the pair."

Maltrana pushed his way into the feminine assembly, dragging Feli by the arm. The first thing they bought should be for her ; come on ! . . . a few of the prettiest pairs, say half a dozen. The girl tried to free herself, protesting in a low voice. How foolish ! What was she going to do with half a dozen ? She had never had so many. . . . They should not waste their money.

But Maltrana made her keep quiet, pretending to be angry.

" You, madam, will take whatever I wish to give you. Come on, Feli, pay this good woman, seeing that you have the money. . . . How handsome my little girl will look when she puts those goddess legs of hers into those pretty stockings ! . . ."

They left the group and Feli carried her present in a parcel. Blushing at its very intimate nature, she whispered in her lover's ear :

" Stockings cause quarrels ; it is a present that brings

bad luck. I have heard that said many a time. We must counteract the bad effect with another present."

And she stopped before a second-hand stall with a heap of the most varied objects. She had seen an enormous glass inkstand with a stopper in the shape of a golden sphere. Feli bought it after a great deal of bargaining, and gave it to Maltrana.

"Take it; you'll need to write an awful lot before you can drain it."

They continued, and entered the yard of the Nuevas Americas, where the wholesale merchants who buy the iron and ornaments from torn-down buildings were located. The shops were made of old timber. The quantity of merchandise was so great that it overflowed into the lanes and open spaces of the big yard.

In one place marble predominated, and a considerable number of crosses from tombs and churches, counters, hand-basins and even coffins whose builders had failed before they had been able to sell them, were displayed. A pungent smell of dust arose from a heap of carpets rolled up, showing the faint colours of the undersides. There were rows of industrial and agricultural implements reflecting a bluish light, and of sign-boards from doors and balconies with gold letters which announced French modistes and elegant barber shops that no longer existed.

In the open spaces were mountains of old rusty iron, so brittle, through oxidation, that it seemed ready to break like glass—engines which had been taken to pieces, because the wheels were stuck in the mud; enormous boilers with the concave bellies stuck into piles of broken plates, and among these groups of industrial junk, rows upon rows of balconies in correct formation and garden railings with the mortar still sticking to the lower end of the spars.

The two lovers tarried but little in that part of El Rastro. They crossed the street of Embajadores, full of people: second-hand dealers who could not afford a stand and groups who listened to the narration of some famous crime sung by a ballad-monger in front of a large sign whereon

the most truculent scenes of the tragedy were painted. Then they entered another yard.

"This," said Maltrana, "is El Rastro of El Rastro: the cheapest of cheap places. The dealers of the Ribera de Curtidores look upon these people as the merchants of the Puerta del Sol look upon them."

As they entered the yard, they saw several second-hand book-shops, in the interior of which were groups of old men in threadbare suits browsing among the books, sticking their noses, crowned with spectacles, into the old volumes; dingy shops in which everything was indescribably confused, oil paintings full of holes, pieces of dirty old glass, old chests and chiffoniers with the veneer off and the ornaments mutilated.

Theatrical scenery, heavy canvases stained with blotches of paint, through which one could guess the remains of palaces and leafy woods, served as curtains and partitions in those miserable shops. The ground of the yard was paved with uneven stones that here and there sank in the mud, disappearing under pools of black fetid water. The lanes, stinking of dust and secular poverty, with their stone islands and crooked seas of liquid mud, gave El Rastro a strong resemblance to the narrow, gloomy streets of a Moorish *zoco*.

In the square they found the most miserable vendors with their stalls, in which they sold broken objects of unknown usefulness.

Maltrana laughingly pointed out some of those stalls, the total value of which could not possibly reach more than three *pesetas*. On a few newspapers hammers without handles were displayed, chipped knife blades, door handles, old cigar cases, greasy copies of some illustrated magazines. The vendor sat motionless on a broken chair, paying little attention to the flies that buzzed close to his lips. From time to time, however, to scare the insects away rather than to attract customers, he shouted: "Penny each! . . . Penny each!"

The most abundant article in the stalls was old iron, red with rust. Isidro admired the infinite patience of the

customers who, wanting a screw or a nail to match one they carried in their hand, spent the entire morning tirelessly searching through the iron heaps from stall to stall.

Some women examined the stalls where broken glass was sold, trying to find something useful, carefully inspecting the cracks and chips of a salt cellar, a tumbler, a bottle, before making up their minds to offer five *centimos* for the lot.

A stall where old dolls were sold attracted Feli—babies who had lived in rich houses, and with a broken cheek or lacking a leg, waited in El Rastro for a second lease of life, offering themselves to the poor children, to the offspring of poverty who sought a ray of happiness in that dungheap.

A poor woman, holding a doll in her hand, argued with the vendor, while her little daughter, clinging to her skirts, endeavoured to grasp a naked doll of sooty face and with one of its legs burned off.

"Give me, mammy . . . me want it!" cried the little girl in her baby tongue.

But the mother dropped the doll on the floor.

"They want three *perros* for it, child! . . . Only rich people can afford that price."

Feli interfered, deeply moved by the expression of terrible disappointment in the girl's face.

"Take it, madam . . . I'll make you a present of it."

And she paid while the poor woman thanked her, and the little girl, with the mutilated doll in her arms, repeated, prompted by her mother:

"Thanky, lady . . . thanky!"

Meanwhile Isidro examined the faces of the vendors. He was looking for one of his uncles, surnamed the Ingeniero who, according to gossip, had retired from business, but still continued to place his stand thereabouts on Sundays.

From the other end of the square the music of an organ groaned, the disjointed melodies reaching Maltrana when there was a short lull in the shouting of the vendors. Taking Feli by the arm, he went to the source of the music. The music had not deceived him: the man who played it was

his uncle, the Ingeniero, so called because of his rare ability in mending musical instruments and mechanical toys. He wore a chestnut-coloured overcoat, with large buttons, and under the visor of his cap appeared the black spots of his spectacles, lined with cloth, which protected his ailing eyes.

He was sitting on an armchair of white and gilt wood with the graceful lines of the eighteenth century ; the torn threadbare silk showed fragments of a pastoral scene. Next to him was a pug-nosed woman, with overflowing fat, sitting on a stool. She protected herself from the rays of the sun by a red lace sunshade, the rich quality of which made a strong contrast with her filthy clothes.

Isidro paid no attention to her. He knew the Ingeniero's weak point. She probably was the favourite of the moment. His uncle, ever since he had become a widower, enjoyed a shameful notoriety in the whole district, from the Ribera de Curtidores to the Paseo de las Acacias. There was no second-hand dealer or keeper of eating-booths he had not courted, taking advantage of his prestige as a clever craftsman and of the enormous savings people supposed he had accumulated. One after another the odalisques endeavoured to win his affection, and a series of scandals and squabbles ensued, but the illustrious Ingeniero never made up his mind to accept any of them formally.

Sitting on the handsome armchair, he turned the handle of the organ, delighted at the squeaky sounds which he accompanied with movements of his head. At his feet Maltrana saw a very complete set of embossed reading cards for the blind. Who would go to El Rastro to look for such things ? . . .

The Ingeniero, noticing through his black spectacles a couple standing before his *establishment*, thought he had customers.

" A magnificent organ, sir. German make, and it's going for a song. You are a person of taste. I'll change the paper and you'll hear something good : the march from ' The Prophet.' "

Isidro answered with a guffaw and at the same time the

greasy odalisque pulled the old man by the sleeve to warn him of his mistake.

" But, uncle, it is myself," said Maltrana.

" And who are you ? "

" Isidro, your sister's son. I have got married ; I want to buy a few things, and I have come with my wife to see and get some advice."

When the Ingeniero heard it was a woman who accompanied his nephew, he suddenly let go the handle of the organ and, tramping on the embossed cards, stuck his spectacles close to Feli's face and looked at her for a long time.

" Very well, nephew, very well. My congratulations," he said, with a knowing smile. " Glad to meet you, young woman, and I hope you'll continue to be for many years as homely and disagreeable. . . . The poor girl is blind. My word, and what a pair of eyes she's got ! "

Then he went on, talking to his enormous companion in the same tone as if she had been a dog :

" Listen, you. Don't you think that this woman is very like Nicanora, the one in the tobacconist's in the street of Mira el Sol ? . . ."

" No, sir, she is not a bit like her," answered the big woman in the same rough tones, displaying a set of sharp yellow teeth between her sausage-like lips. " It's easy to see that you are blind. This lady is far prettier. Nicanora would be tickled to death if she resembled even the soles of her shoes."

" Wooow ! " howled the Ingeniero comically. " There you go ; you had to say something idiotic. Don't pay any attention to her," he continued, addressing the couple. " She hates Nicanora because the girl likes me. Last week they tore each other's hair and were taken to the district gaol."

" I could see the pair of you in hell," said the fat one in a coarse voice.

And satisfied with her charitable wish, she turned a little in her chair, straightened up her parasol and remained motionless, her thick lips tightly closed, pretending to pay no attention to the Ingeniero and his relatives.

The second-hand dealer, sitting on his armchair, advised his nephew where to make the purchases. The store in the Ribera de Curtidores belonged now to his children ; he had handed it over to them so as to be entirely free. It was time for him to have some fun after having worked so long. But he still liked to do a little business, especially in musical instruments. His friends brought him whatever defective mechanism fell into their hands for him to mend ; he always had some jewel like that organ, and every Sunday he put out his stand in the Americas, just as a matter of habit.

The Ingeniero became indignant as he spoke of his relatives. His brother, the antiquary, was stinking with pride because he dealt with marquises and rich priests, and nobody could stand him. When they met, the Ingeniero reproached him for his flings and scandals. He was a Jesuit, a hypocrite ; he lived like a fool, without joy, without adventures. What was the use of money to him ? . . . The blind man advised his nephew not to go and see him in the old yard of the America.

" He will receive you with such mighty airs that you'll feel like giving him a punch in the jaw. . . . As for my sons : they are just like their uncle. They quarrel with me, and would disown me for less than a cent. They hardly recognize me, and they pretend that it is because I live as I do, because I speak to this woman or that one. All hot air ; what they are after is to get away without paying me what they owe me for the store I handed over to them. What does it matter to those Jews what their father does ? . . . I look like a boy beside them. There is only one young fellow in the whole family, one man who knows how to enjoy life and have a good time, and that's me : the Ingeniero."

Afterwards he advised Isidro to buy the bed in his sons' store. They had cheap new goods. He should not buy it in the Americas. They had all been used time and time again. The best of the lot had seen the deaths of a whole family. His cousins would give him what he wanted for a very small sum.

He then inquired after his mother : Señora Eusebia.

He had not seen her for over a year. How was the granny getting along with Señor Polo? Some day, when he felt in the mood for it, he might go to Tetuan. He did not know anybody there now. As far as he was concerned, Madrid ended at the Café San Millan, where some friends of his gathered to admire the females in Cebada Square. If his nephew wanted to see him, he knew where to find him: always at his stand. He loved El Rastro and its vicinity, in spite of the fact that the district, for all its business, was exactly the same as Tetuan, where the family had originated. Rag-pickers, every one of them; some with cart and donkey; others with a shop, but all living from the refuse of the city. The remains of its daily existence, food and old rags, Madrid expelled towards the upland; the remnants of its luxury, furniture and clothes, found their way, through the vagaries of fortune, to the slope of El Rastro, there to accumulate in the dung-heap of the Americas.

"The things I have seen, boy! . . . If those pieces of furniture could but speak! . . ."

He began to turn the handle of the organ and the squeaky melody again rent the air.

Maltrana said good-bye to his uncle, but the latter had a fit of generosity and stopped them a moment.

"Take whatever you wish. Seeing that you are newly-weds, I owe you a present."

And he nobly pointed to the merchandise strewn at his feet. The couple thanked him.

"I don't offer you the organ," he continued, "because I love the 'Grand March.' But as soon as I get tired of it, you can have it; you'll have a good time with it."

The lovers went away. Feli laughed at the Ingeniero, with his airs of Don Juan, and at the monster with skirts who kept him company.

"He is an awful man," said Isidro ironically. "He is the terror of the district. . . . And it seems that you have pleased him; I'll have to watch you. . . ."

Going back to the upper part of El Rastro, they looked into the yard of the old Americas. Feli admired the great stores of antiques and furniture with elegant silk-covered

chairs that enlivened the gloom of the establishments. Isidro pointed out to Feliciana a fat man of bushy eyebrows who was showing some paintings on copper plates to two foreign ladies. That was his uncle ; they would go by without speaking to him, or he might think they were going to ask him for something.

They stayed over an hour in the store of the Ingeniero's sons. Maltrana acknowledged that his cousins were Jews, as his father had said, without joy, without affection, as if their souls had been blinded by the dust gathered in their store. They spoke to him with suspecting seriousness, afraid that he would use their relationship in order not to pay.

Elsewhere Isidro could have purchased the same things for less money. He was paying for their relationship and for the shame that kept him from bargaining. They bought a small gilt bed, a writing-table, a dining-room table, several chairs and a mattress with pillows and two blankets. It was all very modest, very cheap, but the bed, with its glittering ironwork, seemed to them an extravagance, a show of supreme elegance, a token of their determination to live in great style, without privations. Seven *duros* they paid for that jewel. They looked at each other uneasily How they were spending their money ! But their remorse disappeared when they looked at the bed again, paying special attention to the spring mattress. Fancy her, who had never known any other bed than a straw bag on a few boards in Mosco's house ! Fancy him, who for years and years had to wait for a chance to rest his weary bones until other people should vacate the wretched bed ! . . .

The couple left the shop, quivering with emotion at the purchases they had made. At last they were going to have a home, to own something. They were beginning a new life. Inside two hours they would have the furniture in their little home, in their nest close to the clouds.

" What a lot of money we have spent ! " exclaimed Feli, gauging the depletion of her purse by squeezing it in her hand. " If we go on spending money like this, we'll soon be begging."

Isidro reassured her ; he still had more money for the

needs of their home. Afterwards he would earn more; he relied on his pen to make a living.

And he spoke of his pen with bumptious assurance, as if the whole world were impatiently waiting to buy whatever he might deign to write.

They left El Rastro. Near the square, they stopped at the stalls of the cobblers who profit by the shoes collected in the streets. Before them were large heaps of damp shoes extracted from a tub, and picking them up as if they were dead animals, they pulled out the tacks, the soles, the heels —anything that might be of some possible use. The useless parts were thrown on the ground where they stuck to the stones like slimy offal.

Near the statue of the Soldier of Cascorro, they passed two old clothes hawkers, who returned after a round of the streets, advertising their goods at the top of their voices, carrying in their arms several pieces of clothing. They wore hempen-soled canvas shoes and their heads were covered with round caps on top of which, as if they were the signs of their trade, one of them sported an old tall hat and the other was decked with a priest's hat of greenish-black colour. They walked along very sedately, as if they were two cartoons of the upper classes and the clergy, paying no attention to the merriment of the bystanders, and entered into Manco's tavern to talk business between two glasses. Isidro and Feliciana were dying to be in their little home. They hesitated for an instant at the door of a café, not knowing whether they should lunch there or not. No; it would be better to have it at home, absolutely alone, free from the annoying glances of the public.

When the café waiter appeared with a large tray in that lofty flat where they were hiding their happiness, they had to place the steak with potatoes, the fried cod, the dessert of raisins and almonds and the bottle of wine on Señor Vicente's table. They ate with the excellent appetite of youth, with the excitement caused by the novelty of a change of place.

Now and again Feli contracted her brow, worried with her new household duties.

"We are not beginning right. We are spending too much. With what we have paid for this spread they have brought us from the café, I could have managed the house for two whole days."

Maltrana laughed at her. They should be happy. That Sunday was their wedding day, the first day they were spending together. They had time enough to think about economies later on.

They drank from the same glass, taking good care to place their lips in the same spot. They kissed each other between mouthfuls, marking their cheeks with spots of grease and wine.

"Pig, watch what you are doing!" shouted Feliciana with mock seriousness, wiping her face. "Oh, let me eat; Leave me alone! I am too tired. I want a rest . . . for we still have an awful lot to do."

Thanks to Señor Vicente's presence, the lunch ended in comparative quiet. The holy man had come in after hearing several masses, attending the meeting of some brotherhood and speaking with the gentlemen of the Conference, who gave him holy pictures and pious leaflets to distribute among the sinners of the lower classes. Sunday was his busiest day.

He refused to partake of the remains of the lunch which Isidro offered him. Thanks, Señor Maltrana; it wasn't pride, but they were in Lent, and he rigorously fasted. He had taken his modest collation in the street; that was enough for his sinful flesh.

He fixed his ailing eyes on Feli somewhat restlessly, perturbed by the presence of a young and pretty woman in his own study, among the dusty shelves loaded with parchment-bound volumes which contained all the learning and holiness of the world.

"So, you are Mrs. Maltrana, eh? Well, well. May it be for many years to come."

And so saying, he walked up and down the room with his priestly shoes that seemed to be dropping off his feet at every step and accompanied his movements with a monotonous *chac chac*. There was something indescribable about

his legs, that seemed to be annoyed by his loose trousers. Feli thought that such a man had been born to wear a cassock, a habit, some religious cloak. He walked and moved about as if some invisible skirt interfered with his step.

"So you are Mrs. Maltrana?" he repeated again, not knowing what to say. "Well, well. . . . God bless you, and may He give you a lot of children who will accompany you to Heaven. . . . You seem to be a good woman; Señor Maltrana is also good, although he somewhat neglects his soul's salvation. You will guide him along the true path; in such cases, women know a good deal more than we do. I believe we shall get along very nicely together, that we shall live like good Christians, in holy peace."

And he began to outline his future life. Absolute freedom for all of them. They had their own latchkey and he had his. Each could go out and come in at pleasure. There was no need to call upon each other except in case of need, like good brethren. He very often went to bed when the sun was still above the horizon. Other times he retired in the small hours. He was late because of an argument with some blasphemous-tongued sinner, or because he had been nursing the sick in hopes that they might repent at the last hour. Night was just as good as day to serve God. Besides, he slept very little; he disliked sleeping because the Evil One takes advantage of our hours of rest to tempt and torture us with sinful dreams and lewd visions. He longed for dawn as a deliverance, and before break of day, he was up, ready to attend the first mass. When they rose, he would have been up and out through the world many hours.

"Don't imagine, madam," he continued, "that I have always led such a Christian life. There have been times when I was a rake and never went to bed at night."

As he said this, his face lit up with a naïve smile which feigned maliciousness.

"When I was retrieving my shoemaker, a fiend in Granada who had committed enormous sacrileges and of whose conversion perhaps Don Isidro has told you,

there were months, nay, years, during which I never went to bed until well after the sun had risen. The sinner liked to hear me talk, and I clung to him, accompanying him to taverns and to worse places, too; yes, to places where, in the times of the martyrs, holy virgins were taken to be tormented. The Lord forgive me. . . . He drank, and did worse things; I spoke to him, without accepting his drinks, without paying any attention to his blasphemies, waiting until he was thoroughly drunk, to see if in that condition I could take him to church to hear one mass, even one, hoping that God and His Holy Mother would help me and touch his heart. It cost me a terrible lot, but it came to pass! I spent years leading a blackguardedly life, but I may say that I returned one soul to the Lord. . . . Señor Maltrana will tell you in more detail my conquest of the shoemaker."

And he kept walking, winking his bloodshot eyes, rubbing his hands, proud of his cunning and of that famous conversion which constituted the most glorious action in his life.

"You will like this place very much, Señora," he continued. "In this district everything's handy. You have several churches close at hand, with masses every hour. Besides, almost next door, as you might say, there is the cathedral, San Isidro, with the famous Isidorian choir. If you haven't heard it, you should go. A choir of angels, a flock of cherubim who will leave you open-mouthed."

When the men came in, carrying on their backs part of the furniture, Señor Vicente went away. He had to do some mission work that afternoon. He was visiting the people along the road to Extremadura, a wretched lot with no means of existence other than working in the tile works during the summer and stealing thistles and firewood from the Casa de Campo. He would leave them alone, in full possession of the house. He certainly would not dare to do the same thing with other lodgers. But Señor Maltrana could do anything he pleased and make use of his library; all the doors were open to him. If he needed to nail something when they were fixing up their abode, he could find a

little of everything in his tool box. And he showed Isidro in the bottom of a box, nails, tacks, two broken hammers—old iron he had picked up in his excursions through the suburbs and had brought home, impelled by his mania to make use of everything he found in the ground. If the lady wanted some buttons, thread or needle, she could find a heap of them in one of the library shelves.

The lovers, once alone, spent the best part of the afternoon fixing up their furniture. The men had left it grouped together in the centre of the room Isidro was going to use as his study. After lengthy discussions, the couple began to arrange it.

"We'll put the table here, close to the window," said Feli. "You'll write with your back to the kitchen and I'll come from behind, on tip-toe, and bing! I'll give you the biggest fright when you least expect it, throwing my arms around your neck and kissing you . . . like this and this."

And the monastic silence of Brother Vicente's house was scandalously broken by a shower of noisy kisses and by the passionate sighs which accompanied each embrace.

When they arranged the dining-room table, they sat opposite each other, but repenting of having placed such a barrier between themselves, clasped each other's hands above it, while underneath, their feet sought contact. Then, freeing herself with a sudden tug, Feli ran around the table, pursued by Isidro, who roared in a frightful voice:

"I'll eat you, scoundrel . . . I'll chew you up, you little rascal. . . .!"

With those interludes, the arrangement of the furniture, although they had only a few pieces, threatened to be prolonged until well into the night.

The arrangement of the bed was the important job of the afternoon. They moved it around from place to place, without managing to hit upon a place that would please both. They sweated, their faces red with the exertion, as they pushed and tugged at the gilt contrivance in the narrow limits of the room.

Feli, her sleeves rolled up and her curls sticking to her forehead with sweat and dust, nervously stamped on the

floor and screwed up her face, unable to find the most suitable spot for the bed. She wanted to show it off to the best possible advantage ; the gilding must shine in all its brilliancy ; that was what they had spent money for. And when the bed was finally in the best place from an exhibition point of view, other difficulties turned up. Was she going to sleep on the side next to the wall ? . . . No, she wanted to get up first ; she wanted to get up early and tidy the house, and she did not want to disturb Isidro in his sleep.

A new change of position ; new tugs and pushes, and still the confounded bed could not be placed satisfactorily in the narrow room.

In order to appreciate in all its details the beauty of the bed that filled her with pride, Feli placed the mattress, the blankets and the caseless pillows on it. She would buy the sheets next day, for she had been disgusted by those offered in El Rastro. Somewhat undecided, she stood for a long time looking at the bed.

" Do you think it'll look all right, Isidro ? What do you say ? "

Maltrana, clasping her by the waist, whispered into her ear, tickling her with his breath. Yes, any way would do. Were they going to spend the whole afternoon sweating and struggling like galley slaves ? The poor bed had a right to complain of so many pushes and shoves. They should leave it at rest . . . they should honour it in its new position. . . . Feli gave in, exhausted, dizzy with the warm whisperings that caressed her ear and turned her skin to gooseflesh. The echoes of the holy man's house slept for an hour with no disturbance other than the metallic sound of the bed, which seemed to have been doomed to continual restlessness.

When the two lovers, having fixed up their bedroom, returned to what was going to be the study, Maltrana looked for the hammer and nails.

Isidro wanted to decorate his room with some pictures a friend had given him. They were portraits, and the young man explained to Feli the greatness of all the gentlemen

who looked up at you from paper with the expressions of lions, their eyes burning with inspiration.

"Look here, kid. This is Victor Hugo, a demi-god. When I arrange my books, I'll give you something of his to read. This other one is David Frederick Strauss, a man who started to investigate the life of Jesus, and didn't leave a thing standing. This bearded man is Darwin; that other one, who looks like a white hedgehog, is my great man, Schopenhauer; that one over there, with his sad look, as if he were going to cry, is Zola; that old man, so handsome and pleasant is friend Haeckel. . . . All of them distinguished men, estimable characters who will not mind in the least living with us in full enjoyment of youth. The things these illustrious people are going to witness! . . ."

Feli smiled as she looked at the portraits, faithfully believing, in her ignorance, that all of them were gentlemen of Madrid with whom Maltrana was acquainted. That very acquaintanceship made her suspect that they might be objectionable to the owner of the house.

"Isidro, what about Don Vicente? Won't he feel offended when he sees these gentlemen here?"

Maltrana roared when he heard the holy man's name mentioned. The previous day, when he had brought the pictures to the house, he had shown them to him and the pious man had stood for a long time looking at them very perplexed.

"I always mistrust those gentlemen who are very famous," he said. "I don't know those gentlemen, although I am entirely at their service; I never read the papers, but I get suspicious when they speak a lot about a man. Now people only speak of sinners; the saints live in obscurity."

Then, after a long pause, he had asked:

"Are Voltaire and Garibaldi among those gentlemen by any chance?"

Brother Vicente knew no bigger heathens. The name of Voltaire, pronounced with all its letters, in the Spanish fashion, made him shiver, and at the same time his inflamed eyes filled with tears of rage.

"No, Señor Vicente, they are not here."

"I'm glad to hear it. Because if Voltaire and Garibaldi were here, I should have to go away. I could not live under the same roof with those devils."

And somewhat reassured, he examined the pictures, praising some of the gentlemen who, by their beards and serene foreheads, had faces of saints, according to him.

When Maltrana finished nailing some clothes hangers in the bedroom and had definitely placed all the furniture, night was beginning to fall. They had to think about supper and light. The necessities of life disturbed their amorous isolation, waking them out of that unconsciousness of wandering birds who are building their nest for the first time.

Isidro put on his hat to go out and make a few purchases.

"Good-bye, kid. . . . Sweetheart, good-bye; I'll be back in a jiffy."

They bid each other farewell with passionate embraces. They separated and fell again into each other's arms with new kisses as if he were setting off for an endless journey. At last, they parted on the staircase landing.

"Shut the door carefully, dearest," said Maltrana, as if afraid of the greatest dangers during his absence.

He did not dare to go down until he saw the door closed and heard the noise of the key and the bolt.

In half an hour he was back with a package of candles, two meat pies from a neighbouring tavern, a loaf of bread, a bottle of wine and a box of sweets. A real feast! Surely the life of a bourgeois, with your own house and your own woman, is full of charms. Life was merry; one had to give life a Hellenic touch, and Hellenism was the easiest thing in the world to obtain; it could be found in the window of a sweet shop, in the eyes of a tender girl, even if she had been born among the dungheaps of Tetuan.

Feli was waiting for him at the landing, trembling with fear.

"Isidro, is it you?" she asked in an anguished voice.

Night had fallen. As the shadows invaded the new home, the girl had experienced the terror of the unknown. The books in their old shelves frightened her; she was terrified

at the thought of a bleeding Christ Señor Vicente had in the next room. She had taken shelter on the stairs and was impatiently awaiting Isidro's return.

Maltrana lighted a candle and began to spread his provisions on the table. The light and the food soon made Feli happy again.

They ate and drank and very soon spoke of getting to bed. They laughed at the thought that other evenings, at that very hour, they were still wandering through the fields. Now they were going to retire like the hens. Oh, the orderly life! The quiet life, far from everybody, loving each other tenderly, isolated from the world, in the sweet egotism of love! . . . It seemed to them impossible that people were so blind that they did not want to live as they did.

While they ate, they spoke of what they were going to do the following morning. They would visit the shops in Toledo Street so that she could buy some sheets. Isidro, turning a deaf ear to her protests, spoke of buying her a dress he had seen on a wax figure in the window of a fashion shop. Besides, he remembered that Feli had long fancied a pair of high shoes, very high shoes, of a soft lemon colour, with lots of buttons.

"But we'll ruin ourselves, boy," she sighed, resting her head on her lover's shoulder. "You haven't enough money for all that."

Maltrana protested. He would work. And for whom would his money be? . . . For his Feli, of course, for his charming factory girl who had given up everything to follow him, though he was poor and homely.

"Don't say that," she sighed. "You are the handsomest man in Madrid, and the most learned. Even if the very Prince of Asturias should court me, I would refuse him. I've got my Isidro, who is a great deal more for this poor girl than all the princes and kings. If you only knew how jealous I felt of a chum of mine in the factory who used to say that, although homely, you were a very pleasant man! . . ."

The supper ended, they ate the sweets and finished the

last drops of wine. Without being aware of it, Feli had slipped from her seat and settled down on Maltrana's knees. She offered him a sweet between her lips ; they split it in two with a long sticky kiss. After this caress, the young man spoke very seriously of their future.

" This is no way to live, Feli," he said. Do you think I am satisfied with what I have to offer you ? . . . Now we can stand anything because we are young, because we love each other. We have joy and love, a sauce that would render palatable the most insipid of dishes. . . ."

" I am all right, boy. I should like to remain like this always . . . with my head on your shoulder . . . and fall asleep . . . and never wake up."

" Well, I am not satisfied. I want something more. I want to have a servant for you, and a better room. I want you to dress like a lady ; I want you to go to the theatre and some day, as people see you go by, they may say : ' There goes Mrs. Maltrana,' and even the newspapers may speak of ' the beautiful Mrs. Maltrana.' "

Feli laughed like a child.

" How very foolish ! . . . How *superficial* are all those things you want. The most important thing is to love one another. The people can mind their own business ; they may say whatever they like."

Maltrana remained thoughtful for a while. He was full of the enthusiasm, of the faith in his future, of the ambitious dreams he always had when he felt physically comfortable.

" We are making a bad start, Feli—with a lot of wants, like all people who climb very high. . . . You don't realize how far we may go. You love me, but you don't know who your Isidro really is. Until now, I have struggled against hard luck, but you are bringing me Fortune. I will work, I will write a lot ; I feel strong and vigorous for work as I never did before. People will finally pay attention to Maltrana and find that he is a great writer, an extraordinary genius."

" Of course you are ! " exclaimed Feli. " You are a genius ; that's what I have said from the very moment I met you. Let me kiss that brow of yours that hides such

talent ; let me caress with my lips that store from which you draw those pretty things you tell."

She squeezed her lover's head and kissed it passionately, as if she wanted to bite his enormous wrinkled brow.

" I shall give myself up to politics ; I want you to be a great lady, and in this country there is no better road to climb quickly. There is something in me. The day I become known, I shall be respected. I shall be editor of some paper. I shall be elected to Parliament . . . I shall become a cabinet minister, Feli, and you shall be my wife. His Excellency's wife ! . . ."

The young man spoke with that faith peculiar to humble people possessed of some imagination, who even in moments of direst distress feel themselves touched by the tip of a chimera's golden wing and truly believe that in the future riches or political fortune are calmly waiting for them, to be seized by their hands.

Feli laughed with childish enthusiasm, not sensing the slightest doubt as to the realization of her lover's hopes, firmly believing that his dreams might come true the very next day.

" Fancy me, wife of a cabinet minister ! " she exclaimed. " And I shall have carriages and flunkeys that will take off their gold-laced tall hats to me, and my uncle will stand open-mouthed when I pass in my coach through the Puerto del Sol, opposite his office ! . . . And you will go to the Palace and hobnob with great ladies and . . . ! "

A cloud seemed to pass through Feli's face. She tightened her lips, her eyes flashed and she continued in a cross voice :

" No, you shan't be minister ; I don't want you to be minister ; I don't want it ; do you hear me, Isidro ? . . . Tell me that you won't accept such a position even if they offer it to you ; promise me that or we'll quarrel. . . . The world is full of temptations, and what a swarm of high and mighty ladies would gather around this homely fellow who talks like the very angels and is such a genius, all dressed up like a general with one of those coats that have the front embroidered ! . . . just like flies around a cake of

honey! Look out, young man! I am very much wide awake and I can guess things. You shan't be a minister, no, you shan't. Tell me right away that you won't or I'll hit you."

She raised herself on Isidro's knees and pretending to be very angry, slapped him with her little white hand. Then, as if that punishment did not seem enough to her, she passed her fingers through his hair and ruthlessly tugged at his locks.

"No, I won't be a minister!" exclaimed Maltrana. "I resign my portfolio. But leave my hair alone, girl; you are hurting me!"

"All right," said Feli, somewhat calmed. "I'll leave you alone, but be very careful to keep your word. . . . All I want is that some day we should live like some of those couples who needn't think about their daily bread, who send their children to school, have a good home in the Salamanca district, go out for a walk together, and when the weather is bad, take a turn in a carriage, sitting close together, with the window panes raised. Can we manage to be one of those couples, Isidro? . . . You may write a lot; write all you want; I won't mind that. But don't tire yourself out, will you? When you feel tired, stop. I don't want you to strain those pretty eyes of yours."

And she kissed Maltrana's eyes very gently, as if afraid to hurt them with her lips.

"You could also do things for the theatres; my uncle says that it brings in a lot of money. . . . But, what an ass I am! Say no, right away, or I'll scratch you. What on earth was I suggesting? . . . No theatres; they are forbidden. You shall write for the papers, you shall write books, and if some time the high ladies send you letters, carried away by the pretty things you can say, beware and don't pay any attention to them! Look out, for you don't know me yet; look out, for if I love a person, I'm worse than a fly! . . ."

And poor Feli, pretending to be very fearsome, leaned against Isidro, squeezed him in her arms, rubbed her face against his shoulder, caressed his neck with her silky lips.

Both felt possessed by a sweet lassitude, by a strong desire to rest on something more substantial than the flimsy chairs. . . . To bed! But they did not sleep; they did not feel a bit sleepy.

In the darkness of the room, they listened from their bed to the creaking of the lock and the fumbling of Señor Vicente feeling his way to his room.

Feli, pressing her mouth against her lover's arm, so as to smother her laughter, joyfully listened to the noises the holy man made, guessing their meaning. Bing! bang! He was taking off his monkish shoes, throwing them away from him. Now he was undressing; now he was lying on his bed.

A thought struck mischievous Feli and made her twist herself in the bed so as to drown her giggles. Isidro, laughing also, although he did not know why, whispered into her ear and asked her what she was thinking about.

"I am thinking . . ." murmured the girl, "of the pretty figure the holy man must cut in his night shirt."

And the pair of them, tightly clasped together, began to laugh again, their naked flesh shaking under the blanket, coming into contact with a tremor of their smothered merriment.

A murmur sounded in the next room for a long time. Señor Vicente was saying his prayers. Then, a tired snoring broke the silence.

The lovers did not sleep. They laughed at the grotesque snoring interrupted by long sighs. Señor Vicente woke up for a few moments, muttering pious exclamations: "Oh, Lord!" And he fell again into his restless sleep interrupted by visions of fasting and exaltation.

From the other side of the partition they could hear his timorous voice, quivering with terror.

"Let go . . . I know you. You are the Evil One. . . . Get out of here."

Feli could restrain herself no longer, and her burst of childish laughter rolled in the silence of the night like a silver bell.

The night passed in that fashion. The two lovers no

longer laughed ; they kept quiet, as if sleeping. In their room, the bed groaned with light tremors, as if rats were careering under it.

On the other side of the partition, Señor Vicente was talking in his sleep, shaken by the horror of his dreams.

" I know you, Evil One. You are wasting your time showing me those filthy things. . . . My flesh is dead. . . . Glory be to God ! . . . Impurity shall not enter the house of His servant."

CHAPTER VII

IN the pleasant peacefulness of his new life, Maltrana soon finished the book of the Marquis of Jimenez. The grave nobleman was very well satisfied with his work. Besides writing the book, Maltrana had been entrusted by the marquis with looking after the printing and the correcting of the proofs. The marquis was such a busy man ! . . .

Each time Isidro showed him a printed sheet. Don Gaspar examined it very carefully, puffing with satisfaction at the pages that carried a solid foundation of notes. Those which appeared with the text alone made him screw up his face with annoyance.

" They are not serious enough," he said. " They look like the pages of a novel. Look here, young man, why couldn't you have put a few things down at the foot ? . . ."

When the book was finished, the marquis gave Maltrana a new commission. The leader of the party, who was to have written the preface, was putting him off with excuses and was not keeping his promise. Don Gaspar did not feel in the least offended, for he knew the exigencies of a political life, a cruel life that crushes with work those who follow it. Finally, the important personage, giving the marquis proof of the confidence he had in him, had asked him to write the preface himself, authorizing him to sign it with his name. The man who had written such a notable book could surely write, in a few hours, a few pages by way of introduction.

" And, my young friend," continued the state man, " I am passing the task on to you, asking you to do your level best. . . . What an honour, young man ! Fancy writing

something that such an illustrious personage is going to enhance with his signature! Very few people attain such glory at your age. . . . I think it is needless to mention what the preface should say. I leave it entirely to you. The chief loves me very much; if his affairs permitted, he would give my work tremendous praise. Go to it and don't be afraid to overdo it. You know better than anyone else that this book is a résumé of a long political life and that there are in it many notable things."

Coming down, as he said, to business, the marquis spoke of the remuneration for the new work. For the book, for which he had undertaken to pay him three thousand *reales*, he would give him four thousand; he was well pleased with it, although Maltrana had not been as prodigal with the notes as he would have liked. Even at that, the chief, who had seen only the index, had praised the erudition of the work very highly. For the prologue, he would increase the honorarium by fifty *duros*, but he would have to excel himself, writing something that would astound and crush other leaders of the group who dared to argue with the illustrious chief in Parliament.

"These are mysteries of high politics. What an honour for you to be initiated into them at your age! And not a word about it, friend Maltrana; you would ruin me with the chief if he ever found out that someone else had written it. He would not have any confidence in me, and it is to your advantage that he should have. . . . When we become the government! . . . You'll see what happens when we are in power!"

With these hopes, he tried to flatter Maltrana and keep him silent. Isidro wrote the preface and was very pleased with his remuneration. Five thousand *reales*, of which he had already spent one half! . . . Enough money for over two months remained, and by that time it would be funny if Don Gaspar, flattered by his success, did not want to write another book. Life decidedly was a merry proposition.

He was still under the spell of his placid, orderly, quiet life with Feli. The girl showed herself to be an excellent housekeeper. In the mornings, she went down to market

wrapped up in her shawl and with a basket on her arm; the rest of the day she spent with her sleeves rolled up, cooking, dusting and mending Isidro's scanty clothes.

He had never been so neatly dressed. His friends remarked with astonishment the whiteness of his shirts and the cleanliness of his hat. Besides, he was putting on flesh, he had a better colour. Feli's stews, the country dishes she had learned in her father's house and the reasonable hours he kept, gave new vigour to his body, emaciated as it had been by the privations and disorderliness of his bohemian existence.

"He's got a girl," his chums said, "who looks after him; a real jewel; and pretty too. He's a lucky fellow!"

They commented on Maltrana's cautious craftiness; for knowing his friends' glib tongues and impudent audacity, Isidro had taken good care not to give them his address. He was afraid they would pay him a visit; and when he wanted to see even his most intimate chums, he arranged to meet them at one of the Atheneum rooms.

For her part, Feli also experienced the beneficent effects of her new life. She looked happy; only from time to time did a cloud darken her eyes when she remembered Mosco. What was her father doing in the hut in Carolinas? What did he think of her? . . .

When on Sunday afternoon they went to the suburbs, taking good care to avoid Cuatro Caminos, or walked along the most lonely avenues of the Retiro, Isidro, full of pride, admired his girl, as if she were his own work, delighted with her beauty.

"If your former friends could see you now! . . . You look like a real lady. One of these days, I'll buy you a hat."

Feli had bought her suit in a fashion shop in Toledo Street. She had been attracted by some figures on the pavement, like headless ladies gaudily dressed and lined up for some reception. From the waist of each hung a piece of paste-board with the price on it. Feliciana had chosen a blue dress with black trimmings, "latest fashion from Paris," according to the solemn declaration of the shop attendant. With that dress and a modest mantilla, she

looked like a different girl altogether. She even hid in a pair of gloves those pretty hands of hers which were the pride of the Carolinas district.

But what satisfied her feminine vanity most were her shoes, the famous lemon-coloured shoes she had longed for and which she regarded as the best present from Isidro. Footwear was one of her fads. She considered her feet the most precious part of her body, and as she walked, she coquettishly fixed her eyes on the two sharp-pointed pale-gold spots that alternately appeared and disappeared at the edge of her skirt.

From their Sunday promenades they always came home tired and dust-covered, longing for the sweet restfulness of their little home, for the supper that was awaiting them, for the night of loving intimacy that was interrupted from the other side of the partition by Señor Vicente's visions of temptation.

"We have become a pair of bourgeois," Isidro would say. "There is not in Madrid a legal couple who lead a more virtuous life than this couple of . . . free partners."

And they became more and more isolated, satisfied with their love, forgetting the world, thinking that life could last for ever in that fashion.

When Maltrana went out into the street, he looked curiously at people, as if they belonged to another race, as if he came from a different world. As he went down the stairs from his lofty room, he thought he was descending to another planet.

The great majority of the passers-by did not love and were not loved. And yet they could live! . . . He hardly remembered the not far distant times when he lived as if he were in Limbo, with no desires other than to read, to spout a few paradoxes, and to hit at the upper classes, without becoming aware that there were women in the world and a feeling called love. Now, it seemed impossible to him to have lived thus, like a plant, a stone, without real joy, sweet sorrows . . . without an ideal. As he had been, so were most of the people who passed near him. They lived preoccupied by the grossest aspirations, without a

spark of love. All the poetry of the world was concentrated in a few persons, such as Feli and himself, in those who loved.

Maltrana proudly thought that a very small aristocracy exists in the world, and that he belonged to it : the aristocracy of love, of those who know how to embellish life with their passions. The others were poor animals who yawned with ennui, their eyes fixed on the ground and their feet stuck in the mud, even if they enjoyed all the refinements of comfort.

One afternoon, Maltrana met Señor Manolo, on the pavement of the Puerta del Sol, where he had his office.

" Well, well, citizen," he said ironically. " You and Feli have put your foot in it. It seems impossible that intellectuals who don't belong to the fourth estate should do such idiotic things."

He looked at him with his restless eyes, wiping the sweat off his brow, panting before unleashing on Isidro the avalanche of his indignation.

" It seems impossible, man. . . . And don't run away with the idea that I am going to make any objections to the fact that you and Feliciana have decided to stick together in virtue of your perfect autonomy. That may scandalize the reactionaries and the unitarians, but it can't scare me, for I am a conscious citizen, and I have made my own arrangements when it has suited me. Man is free, woman is free, and love ought to be free and autonomous. . . . But, what is a mean trick, worthy of a good hiding, is that such a foolish wench should leave her father absolutely alone in Carolinas. I go to see him oftener than I used to do. Chispas lives with him and they are not faring badly at all. But poor Mosco feels sad ; he lacks something. He doesn't want the girl mentioned in his presence, and you, even less. He drinks like a fish, and when he is drunk, he raves against the gamekeepers and wants to go to El Pardo and kill, face to face, the keeper who assassinated Puesto en Ama. You have made him so mad that some fine day he'll do something crazy."

Maltrana was deeply moved by remorse when he thought

of the harm he had caused his friend. He felt a vehement desire to make amends for his fault. Señor Manolo could intercede on their behalf; he would manage to have his brother pardon them.

"What you have done," continued Señor Manolo, "is a foolish trick that can't be excused. You loved each other? . . . All right. Why not come to me, a practical man, and together we would have gone to Carolinas for a little chat, and I, with my gift of the gab, would have said . . . 'Brother: These kids love each other. They are old enough to be autonomous and they ought to unite in the eyes of God. Besides, that's the only way to settle the affair. They are going about, arm in arm, after nightfall, through fields and dales, according to evil tongues, and I am afraid they took their lunch before lunch time. That's all.' And when the discussion had been started and we had discussed all that would be necessary, I should have closed, and I am sure that you, in virtue of your individual rights, would have gone to bed together without Mosco's trying to play the rôle of a centralizing tyrant. But now, after your senseless prank, I doubt if it will be possible to keep the discussion within its proper channel."

Impelled by remorse, Maltrana had an audacious idea, and he spoke of going with Señor Manolo to see Mosco and beg his forgiveness.

"No; it is too soon," said Señor Manolo. "Don't go! If you appear before him suddenly, he is capable of treating you as if you were a deer. He has a terrible desire to kill somebody. Leave it to me; I'll fix it up. You don't know what my cleverness can do; you may be sure that I am diplomacy personified."

He would soften the wild beast little by little. As long as they did not go to see him, there would be no danger. Mosco did not leave the district and had sworn not to go to Madrid, so as not to meet the elopers. He grew furious if anyone mentioned them to him. Señor Manolo never mentioned them, although he had known their whereabouts ever since the week after they had run away. They lived near Cebada Square in the house of a reactionary, of a

madman who distributed holy pictures and amused people with his sermons.

"I know everything," said the foreman, to Maltrana's astonishment. "In my office we know everything that happens in Madrid."

And he looked at his office, the wide pavement, with its endless stream of passers-by and its hawkers, standing still, advertising lottery tickets, cheap books and little pups with a bell at their necks.

Maltrana left Señor Manolo after the latter had promised to intercede on their behalf so that Mosco would forgive them. He did not need to worry any more ; the business was in safe hands. He was diplomacy personified.

When Maltrana arrived home, he spoke of his meeting with Señor Manolo. Feli cried a little, but her sorrow was considerably briefer than Isidro had expected. The wretched life she had led in Carolinas, the nocturnal adventures which kept apart father and daughter, making them familiar with the danger of death, had contributed to dull her feelings towards her father. She had seen her father wounded and at death's door so many times that she looked upon her elopement as an incident of little importance. The only live feeling in her was that of love.

"Let Uncle Manolo fix that up," she finally said : "let father forgive us. But we won't be separated, eh ? I want to be with you, always with you."

One morning, as Isidro was going through the Puerta del Sol towards the National Library, he recognized by the picturesque harness on the horse, Zarathustra's cart. The rag-picking philosopher was sitting inside the vehicle, at the corner of Cebada Street, his beard spread on his knees, waiting for his servant Bobo, who was gathering refuse in some upper stories.

Zarathustra raised himself when he recognized Maltrana, laughing maliciously and winking his small eyes. This was the first meeting since Isidro's elopement with Feliciana, an elopement that had set all tongues wagging in Carolinas.

"Don't you go over there," he said, becoming very serious. "Mosco is a tough customer and he is simply

fuming. It is two months since you went away, but he'll shoot you just the same as if it were one day only. Some fellows, among the rag-pickers, who liked Feliciana, have found out where you live and they tell him lots of things about you. One day he spoke to your grandmother, and he told her that he'll shoot you on sight. . . . But I don't think he'll look for you, no, I don't think so. He spends the nights at El Pardo, and sometimes he even goes there in the day time. He's got it bad ; he is hunting mad. They tell me that the keepers are all up in the air about him. At first they kind of pretended not to see him, for they didn't want any real trouble, but now they are getting mad and they say : ' He wants us to kill him.' One of these days, when the king is out hunting, he'll meet Mosco, who goes all over El Pardo as if the place belonged to him."

Zarathustra suddenly switched the subject to the girl.

" You have taken away the pick of the district, you rascal. Most of the young fellows over there envy you and would like to see you dead ! . . . But what you've done is really a childish trick. Ah ! if you were as old as I am ! If you had the knowledge I have ! . . . You'll get tired ; love is a kind of measles of the mind which we all have to have at a certain age. Believe me, boy, a man is better alone. You know that I spent a few months in the Modelo gaol. I gave my third wife such a beating that I left her dripping with blood when I caught her with a servant who was but a young fellow. And the dirty beast was almost sixty. When I left the gaol, I took up with her again, and when she died I had others. They are all the same and you must take them as they are, for we need them. I told you already that man is a noble and haughty animal, and that woman. . . ."

" Yes, Zarathustra, I know it," interrupted Maltrana, for he was afraid of the old man's verbosity. " Woman, unless she has a good dress and a tight-fitting shoe and other falderals, gives her body to the devil. Good-bye, great philosopher ; kind regards to my grandmother."

Zarathustra did not let Isidro go until the latter informed him of his address. Some morning, when Zarathustra

finished his work early, he would go to see them and have a chat. Feliciana would be glad to talk with Señor Polo, who had seen her come into the world, so to speak.

For some time now, meetings reminded the lovers of the upheaval caused by their elopement from the hunter's home.

Isidro did not have any work, but the prudent hands of Feliciana still held some of the money from the Marquis of Jimenez. Isidro had visited the nobleman to see if he had any new ideas and if he wanted to publish new works; but the great statesman was still in the midst of his literary honeymoon.

The work reigned supreme, with its magnificent covers, in the show windows of the bookstores. Did it sell? . . . not one copy. The marquis made the declaration with great disappointment; nobody wanted to learn the true solution of the social problem. What a country! . . . no wonder it was in such a mess. What was the use of working your head off, night after night, studying and condensing into innumerable notes all the knowledge in the world, if afterwards they paid less attention to you than they would to a second-rate bullfighter?

The marquis made his complaints to the young man, forgetting momentarily the latter's participation in the work. But he was fully compensated for the public's indifference by those to whom he had given presentation copies, and who kept the book on their tables without ever opening it, and by the encomiastic articles in the newspapers, the work also of people who looked only at the index.

The chief's preface had appeared in all the newspapers belonging to the party.

"What a man, friend Maltrana!" exclaimed the marquis. "What a genius! And what a classic style is his!"

In his enthusiasm, he forgot who was listening to him, and continued to praise the chief and the kindness with which he had flattered him in several paragraphs of his preface.

The Marquis of Jimenez was not thinking of publishing

another book until the following year. It is a bad policy to be too prodigal with your genius. Besides, he felt fatigued, for a work such as the one just published cannot be written every month.

He wailed about his fatigue and his work before Maltrana with a sincerity that made one feel like crying. . . . For the present, he was busy reading press criticisms. He spent the nights in restless sleep, worrying about what the paper would say the following day, and when he found some laudatory paragraph, he read it to his family. He then cut it out, and shutting himself up in his office, spent hours and hours looking with loving eyes at the small bit of paper which he afterwards showed to his visitors with the unconcerned air of a great man who is surfeited with glory.

Maltrana gave up temporarily all idea of securing another job from him. But he did not worry about it ; somebody else would give him work. When he found himself without employment, he began to leave his house and spent the afternoons at the Atheneum and the cafés talking with the younger litterateurs. He even began to retire late at night and advised Feli not to sit up for him. Literature had its duties ; he needed to mix with people to make himself known and acquire a name, he had to attend the premières at the theatre and to take part in the debates at the Atheneum and make a display of knowledge in the endless and barren discussions as to whether there is a God or not, and whether the Church should be separated from the State.

One morning Feli woke him up from a sound sleep. The previous night he had taken part in a discussion on " the philosophy of the marvellous," and although he was absolutely certain that such a performance would not be of any practical benefit to him, and that the newspapers would have only a line or two about him, he rested satisfied with his task. The great unknown man woke up very quickly when he heard that Señor José, his step-father, was waiting for him in his study, visibly agitated. What on earth did the good mason want with him ?

When he went in to meet him, Señor José, almost in tears, seized him by both hands.

"What a misfortune, Isidro! What a shame! . . . If you don't manage to fix it up, I'll die."

The young man made him sit down and tried to quiet him. What was the matter? He did not need to excite himself like that, for there is a way out of all scrapes. And the mason, in Feli's presence, spoke of Pepin, the famous Barrabas, who was going to be the cause of his death.

He was in the Modelo gaol. Three days before he had been arrested with other lads for a theft of copper and wire from a factory in Vallecas. A month previous to that, he had run away from the house in Artistas Street and his father had not been able to find him. That flight was not the first. Isidro knew that he had disappeared several times and that the thrashings he received when he returned home were of no avail. He had a dog's hide, according to Señor José. All his father's blows and admonitions had been of no use at all. He was a vagabond of the first water; all the talent his brother had for books, he had for doing mischief. He became the leader of his chums, for he was the most daring, and they had made him their captain.

"How he has made me suffer!" continued Señor José. "I have lost several days' pay in the last month, in order to go and look for him and fetch him home, and all in vain. And that in spite of the fact that I retain my ability to follow up a scent from the time I was a Civil Guard. I have spent whole days in the neighbourhood of Pimiento Hill. They told me that he was around there with a gang of blackguards and a hussy who is his mistress, Pirri, they call her, a slip of a girl, thin as a reed, and with her face full of scratches; she sells newspapers at the Puerta del Sol and gathers up her skirts so that the old gentlemen may look at her legs, which are like a pair of flutes. I haven't been able to catch him . . . I then looked for him in the hill of Principe Pio, in some caves under the barracks near the North Station. I thought I could catch him in what they call the Crystal Palace, a miserable hut used as a meeting place by all the loose women who wait for the soldiers. . . . I didn't see him there either. And last night, a fellow from

Zamora who served with me and now belongs to the police, told me where the rascal is. He is in the Modelo gaol; just think of it, Isidro, a son of mine in the Modelo gaol! . . . I, his own father, may appear somewhat coarse and I may be taken for an ignoramus, but wherever I have been, nobody has said anything against me and my superior officer always held me up as a model of honesty."

Señor José rubbed his eyes with his hands, to stem his tears. A son of his in gaol! . . . It seemed to him that all his past of unshakable integrity and aggressive honesty had crumbled at one blow. Who would have told him when he went along the road, his gun on his shoulder, conducting criminals in irons, that he, the soldier of the law, the guardian of order, would procreate gaol fodder, increasing by one unit the sombre and desperate army that lived in continuous war with society!

He could no longer have the courage to stop his former chiefs on the street, peaceful veterans who vegetated in Madrid, living as best they could with their miserable pension. He would not dare to say: "How do you do, captain?" to those gentlemen who, remembering his upright and obedient past, shook his hand as if he were their equal and asked him about his family. How could he tell them that his son, his only son, was in gaol because he was a thief? . . . That miserable blackguard had exiled him from the world of decent people, had snatched from him the pride of a virtue which was his only luxury. At fourteen in gaol, and he bore his own name, the name that had been praised so often for his services to society!

"I wish," continued Señor José, sobbing, "I wish, Isidro, you would do all you can in this matter. Really, I don't know what I want you to do. I don't ask you to get him out; even if that were possible, I would oppose it myself. Let him rot in gaol; let him die . . . he's a rotter!"

But after those stern words, spoken by the ex-Civil Guard, the father reasserted himself.

"I wish you would go and see him," he continued. "I can't go myself; I should kill him, I should tear him to pieces if I saw him. . . . You can speak better than I;

he respects you and will pay attention to you. Give him a lecture ; if he has fallen, he can at least repent and mend his ways. I have known great criminals that later became honest people. And "—here he hesitated—" if you know the judge who will look into his case, or some influential person, for God's sake, see what you can do for him. Let the boy get out of this scrape and as soon as he is on the street I'll get a hold of him, and I'd rather kill him than let him get away from me again."

Señor José was very much upset by the occurrence.

What a world, oh, Lord! Everything in it seemed changed and the people were different from those he had known in his younger days. He thought that decent people were a caste by themselves to which he and his offspring would eternally belong. That is why they held worthy ideals, respected authority and supported the established order of things. . . . And now, all of a sudden, a piece of his own flesh, a prolongation of his own person, passed over with one jump to the camp of the evil-doers, laughing at the doctrine of order and submission his father had taught him.

Señor José was beginning to wonder if the world were not really different from what he had imagined it to be. He did not feel the same energy as before to abominate the demagogues who wanted to turn society upside down so that the underdogs could get on top. Sorrow was making him tolerant. He no longer compared society to a military organization ; it was rather a sad and tame flock that was forced to graze in desolate fields by the bad shepherds, while the latter kept the richest lands for themselves. The wolves of misfortune prowled around the flock and snatched away the weaker animals, the ones that fell to the rear.

" I tell you, Isidro, I am a different man," he continued, " and every day I lose some of my beliefs. This is the end of the world ; all is lies and deceptions. I am beginning to believe that we live in full farce and that some of us are playing the rôle of fools. I am certain of one thing—there are many, many thieves who are unknown and will remain

unknown to t uard. If I had to take criminals to gaol, I shou them with kindlier eyes. Poor devils! The s too. . . . The thieves, the real thieves who u and order and who endanger the lives of their f s are higher up, so high up that the police cannot reach them."

Señor José spoke as a blind man who is gradually recovering his sight. He looked with astonishment at the things that surrounded him. A feeling of injustice was shaking his simple, upright mind, which began to lose the hardness of military discipline.

"We live among thieves, Isidro. For instance: I am working on a great building, in the suburbs, that the government is putting up for barracks, or an asylum, or some such thing. The job has been let out to a contractor; the contractor gets his good millions and he puts up the building as if it were made of cardboard. The main thing is to get money, lots of money, and then divide it up with the politicians who protect him. We, who know the business, shake with terror when we see the conditions under which they force us to work. We have put up only one floor, so far, and we are sure that the day it is loaded, it will collapse and crush everyone who happens to be underneath. As long as we are not there! . . . The contractor comes to the job in his motor-car once a week, has a look around, gives orders to make everything as flimsy as possible and goes away. The cement is dust from the roadside, the walls are as thin as partitions, the columns are hollow. . . . One of these days there'll be a catastrophe worse than the Second of May. . . . And for three or four *pesetas*, several hundred honest men are working exposed to sudden death, while the blackguards are living like lords. I am impartial and I recognize my mistakes. Those people who preach revolution to the underdog are, as I think and as I always thought, unscrupulous demagogues, but I believe they are not very far wrong in some things."

Señor José spoke for a long time in this manner, mixing up the disappointments of life with the sorrows caused him by the rebellious Barrabas. Isidro promised that he would

go to see the boy that very afternoon. He was a friend of the governor of the gaol and would recommend the confounded rascal to him. He would try to find among his acquaintances someone who had influence with the judge.

The mason went away and in the afternoon Maltrana went to the Modelo gaol. Feli urged him to go and see his step-brother. Her feminine sensibility had made her take an interest in this unfortunate event that had come to disturb the domestic peace. She vaguely remembered Barrabas through having seen him prowling around Carolinas with a gang of youngsters. Poor fellow ! He looked like a nice boy ; perhaps his bad associations had caused his downfall.

Isidro entered the gaol, following the warder whom the governor sent with him as a guide. When the gate opened and he saw at a glance the enormous naves and the superimposed galleries with their rows of doors and ponderous locks, a feeling of sadness and coldness seized him. The silence of the grave weighed upon the invisible population. The light from the skylights overhead became dimmer and dimmer as it descended and acquired the twilight opaqueness of a cellar. The rows of doors reminded Isidro of the layers of niches in a cemetery. Behind them, silent men ate and thought ; but they were living corpses who were doomed to immobility by the narrowness of their graves ; living creatures who felt life only at the sound of a bugle : when their mess was handed out to them through the wicket in the door, and at sunrise, when they were taken out like caged beasts, for a few minutes' walk. A flock of birds that had taken shelter under the skylights, fluttered in the greyish light. Their chirping and the rustling of their wings sounded like a mocking echo of the joyous laughter of spring.

Maltrana thought with horror of the possibility of a lengthy stay in one of those masonry coffins. Hundreds of men lived there without a shout, a word, a sigh breaking the silence of those naves which seemed to belong to an abandoned cathedral. He had never considered himself a brave man ; he had never experienced an aggressive, brutal

impulse, but at sight of that cemetery of living men, he swore to be even more prudent in the future than he had been in the past. If he were insulted, he would forgive the offence rather than come to that silent hell for having given way to his animal spirits.

The warder led him up a stairway at the end of which were located the cells for juvenile offenders. They had advanced hardly a few steps in a long corridor, when the gaoler who looked after that section gave a shout, and a barefooted boy, as light as the wind, ran from door to door undoing the locks with a thunderous racket.

A boy appeared at each door and stood at attention with soldier-like rigidity. They looked at each other out of the corners of their eyes and tightened up their lips so as not to burst out laughing.

They wore dilapidated hempen-soled shoes or stood barefooted on the cold glazed bricks. Dressed in greasy, patched clothes, some wore only a shirt and a pair of man-sized trousers held up by a strap across their chests and backs. The close-cropped heads showed the curious formation of the cranial bones of many. There were enormous heads that seemed to shake, through sheer weight, on the slender, weak necks that sustained them ; others presented at the back a right angle, a straight cut that indicated the lack of a certain part of their brains. Some of the boys had roguish, impudent eyes that looked at people with aggressive fixity. The necks of some were furrowed by scrofula marks or their cheeks and noses pitted by small-pox. They stood erect, their hands flat against their thighs and their stomachs protruding ; their shirts bulged with papers and things they had tucked away to use as toys.

Maltrana's guide knew them all as old customers of the institution. The first one he noticed was Machaco.

" When they brought him in here for the first time," said the warder, " he was so frightened that he had a fit at the gate and we had to doctor him. Now he looks upon this place as if it were home. Say, how many times have you been here ? . . ."

He addressed the question to Machaco, and the latter answered, smiling with childish simplicity :

" This makes twenty-three."

" They brought you in because you stole a purse from a lady, isn't that it ? . . . You probably gave it a tug and then ran away."

" No, sir," answered Machaco, becoming very serious, " I don't do that kind of work any more. I took it right from inside her pocket."

The warder smiled at the lad's professional dignity and went on introducing the other boys. A lad with a large head and frightened eyes, dressed in a brown coat, was Paleto. They had brought him in because he had stolen a pair of corsets. He looked at Maltrana with the eyes of a dying victim, thinking that he was some influential gentleman.

" Yes, sir ; I lifted the corsets," he murmured in his rough country accent. " I was hungry . . . I came to Madrid with my father. . . . We were looking for work. I won't do it again, sir . . . I am a good boy."

Paleto's grotesque contortions and his groans excited the barbarous merriment of the other lads.

" Ha ! ha ! " roared the scoundrels, mocking Paleto's fear and repentance.

" Silence ! " yelled the warder imperiously.

They stood motionless, their eyes fixed on the ground, but with a smile playing on their lips, as if highly amused by the incidents of prison life.

The warder went on naming the double row of boys. This one was Besugo, a partner of Gallego, Margallo and Viruelas, and all four were accomplices of Barrabas in the theft of copper and wire in Vallecas. Maltrana's brother was being kept apart through fear of a fight, for he had threatened to chew them alive because they had talked too much when questioned by the police.

" The boy is a jewel," said the warder ironically. " He's got talent. Believe me, it would be a darned good thing for his family if he croaked here. When he grows up, he'll certainly become a tenant of one of the lower cells."

. . . . . .

Maltrana examined his brother's friends, all of them youths of sinister looks and strong lower jaws, bigger than the rest of their faces. Viruelas was a monster of ugliness, his face gnawed by disease, his nose flattened down, his eyes almost hidden by the overhanging eyebrows, and emitting a nauseating stench from his mouth and skin.

Afterwards, the warder introduced some others : Golfin, a cherub of curly locks and blue eyes ; Boto, Feo and Pasiego, who had spent several terms in the establishment and always *worked* together ; Morritos, Lenteja, and Lagarto, who, in spite of being under thirteen years of age, had their sweethearts outside the gaol, a fact that gave them tremendous prestige among their chums. Those sweethearts of theirs could almost be their mothers. They were prostitutes who treated the passion of their youthful lovers as a joke and advised them to steal, for they could believe in their love only when they brought money along with them.

The warder spoke to one of the boys .

" How is your sweetheart ? Does she ever come to see you ? "

He answered with the negative shake of the head. Women! they were all alike ! They loved you only when you brought them money ! And his degenerate face, prematurely wrinkled, supplemented his words with a cynical gesture.

Maltrana greeted the turnkey in charge of the boys' section, an old man of shaggy beard and kindly eyes. The warder explained to Maltrana the difficulties of the old man's position. They had to be kind to the inmates—the governor insisted that they abstain from all violence—but, at the same time, they had to be very stern, for the boys, mischievous as monkeys, became very impudent and started a riot if given too much rope. By means of an ingenious telegraphy, they communicated with each other from cell to cell, plotting schemes against any turnkey who was distasteful to them.

Their means of expressing their dissatisfaction with the turnkey was *to give him the lid*, that is, each boy, locked up in his cell, would knock at the door, at a prearranged signal, with the wooden disc used to cover up the orifice of his

latrine, thus raising such a racket that the whole gaol shook. The turnkey serenaded in that thunderous fashion had to go, and he was transferred to the men's galleries, a good deal quieter and better disciplined than the ones where these gorillas of crime were kept.

At the end of the gallery, Maltrana met Barrabas standing rigidly at the door of his cell.

He had seen his brother come in and had remained serene, not displaying the least emotion. It was his pride to be *a good prisoner*, imitating the gestures and stoicism of the veterans of crime who lived downstairs, to know the bugle calls and to move about automatically, as if he had been through several campaigns, and as if he lived in gaol as he would in his own home.

He saluted the warder, raising his hand to his head, and stood still.

" Fine, first rate," said Maltrana. " You seem to be living here perfectly all right, while your poor father is going to die of shame. Scoundrel! Thief!"

Barrabas smiled and shrugged his shoulders very slightly as if he wanted his brother to understand that he need not have come to gaol in order to rebuke him.

" This boy is a dangerous character," said the turnkey, patting him on the back of the neck. " He'll go to Ceuta. When they brought him in, he was a little pale and scared, but as soon as he was put in here, he made himself at home. If we let him, he would boss the whole show. He wants to be chief of the gang and fight about it with Machaco, the present chief ; he's a regular bully. . . ."

Maltrana, looking at his brother with disgust, continued to reprimand him.

" You are here because you are a thief. Do you know what that means, Pepin ? Do you realize the shame you are bringing upon us all ? Don't you see that you are going to kill your poor father ? . . ."

Barrabas relapsed from his stiff attitude and looked at the boys down the corridor with his small, hostile, homicidal eyes.

" I'm here," he answered in a raucous voice, " because

those fools got into a funk and told the judge everything. They are the ones to blame ; as soon as I can, I'll take their guts out."

And he straightened himself up with the bombastic arrogance of a cockerel, shaking his emaciated, undersized body which bore all the marks of a born criminal.

Maltrana understood that his words would have no effect whatever on the lad. The boy had gone a long distance down-hill since he had seen him. Caught by the machinery of crime, as soon as he came out of gaol he would start on the downward path again. The gaol was his home, and his real family were those youths isolated from society whom he had chosen with the attraction engendered by common pursuits.

Barrabas continued to speak, paying no attention to the look of reproof in his brother's eyes, ingenuously believing that the thefts committed by his gang were wonderful deeds. Perhaps he felt pity for that unfortunate brother of his who could not fight with another man and did not have enough stamina to snatch away a miserable handkerchief.

He received attention in the gaol, he declared with pride. He had been there but a few days and already the turnkeys praised him because he was *a good prisoner*, always first in the line up and a great help to them, for through his influence the rest of the boys obeyed them. His chums and partners respected him. They knew that he was not an ordinary sneakthief—one of those who shove their fingers into a pocket and then run away, scared blue at the least alarm, nor was he one of those *fortnighters*, who spend a couple of weeks in gaol without knowing why they have been arrested. He knew why he was there, and his chums knew his history. At the Crystal Palace he had messed up two of his most daring companions and in all the caves of Principe Pio, owing to his gift of the gab and to his skill with the knife, nobody dared to dispute with him over the best place to sleep and the finest females of the flock of newsvendors and exploiters of old gentlemen, who followed the boys to their lair.

When the young prisoners discovered that the visitor was

not a lawyer, but Barrabas' brother, they abandoned their military postures and walked over towards each other to have a little chat.

Barrabas, seeing that the warder who accompanied Maltrana was moving toward the groups of boys, became more frank ; he wanted to astonish Maltrana with the greatness of his future.

" Do you see those fellows ? " he asked, pointing at the boys. " Well, they are all afraid of me, and they want me to be their captain. We have decided, when we come out, to form a gang, and I shall be their chief."

From cell to cell a thick volume of greasy leaves, the corners of the binding worn out by handling, circulated—the history of *José Maria, king of Sierra Morena.* The diseased imaginations of the young criminals became excited when they read in the silence of the prison the exploits of the chivalrous bandit, or when they admired in the pictures of the arrogant figures of the knights of the highway with their enormous side-whiskers, their blunderbusses under their arms and their belts full of gold coins. That was what they were going to be as soon as they went into the open ; Barrabas would march at their head through hills and roads, like a glorious captain. And in spite of the governor, who wanted to stamp out that kind of literature as if it had been poison, the book passed on, through some clever trick, from prisoner to prisoner.

" If they follow me," continued Barrabas with emphasis, " if they are not cowards, you'll hear about me. . . . Some day I may load you and father with gold coins. . . . Each man knows his own business. What could I be ? A bricklayer, like my father ? Thank you : I don't want to die squashed like a toad, or begging for alms in the streets."

He wanted to live, to have joy, happiness, women, the best of the best. He knew where to find it all ; it was only a matter of having enough guts to take it, and he had enough. Although he was a boy, he had seen a lot.

His smile was the grimace of an old man, a gesture of disgusting precocity that shone in his eyes with ferocious brilliancy.

Maltrana, annoyed at the boy's cynicism, avoiding his glances which seemed to insult him, turned his eyes to another boy who was coming towards them. Although barefooted and wearing no clothes other than a pair of trousers and an undershirt, his long shiny hair was carefully combed and parted in the middle.

" Why are you here," asked Isidro.

The boy replied very gravely :

" For stabbing . . . a cheese."

Barrabas laughed at the stupid joke with thunderous guffaws and his laughter was echoed by the impudent giggles of the neighbouring groups. All the boys had discovered who Maltrana really was, and they looked at him with impertinent eyes. They considered him an enemy because of the lecture he had given his brother. He was just the same as many members of their families who came to scold them in their companions' presence and made them cut sorry figures, as if they were not men already and worthy of some consideration.

" Let's have order," said the turnkey, walking over to the boys when he heard their laughter. " The first one that starts anything gets a wallop."

He threatened them with his knuckles, like a school master. Then, pointing to the boy who had spoken about stabbing a cheese, he added :

" This fellow is here because he has no shame at all. His father is rich, and he has robbed him ; he pawned things from his home and has run away with women. He isn't fourteen yet. His family, wishing to correct him, have sent him to this school of morals and good habits."

And he looked at Maltrana, half-amazed, half-ironically, as if he admired the immense stupidity of a father who wanted to correct his son by locking him up in the Modelo Gaol.

" This young gentleman will go far," he continued. " The boys call him Levita and he is Barrabas' greatest pal—the one who fills Barrabas' head full of nonsense, telling him all the things they can do together when they get out of here."

Maltrana began to feel uneasy, surrounded by those mischievous monkeys, fearing that he might be made the victim of some ridiculous scene. As he turned his head, he twice caught the malicious winks, the grimaces made behind his back by the boys to Barrabas. His step-brother seemed to encourage them with a faint smile.

From the other end of the gallery came voices imitating the grunts of several animals. The turnkey went from one side to the other, threatening the boys with the well-known fillip. They all guessed that Maltrana was the enemy, the moralizing and pestiferous relative who comes to preach virtue. Virtue to them, who were men, every one of them, and knew all there was to be known!

Maltrana did not want to continue his visit longer; besides, the warder who acted as his guide was becoming impatient.

He promised Barrabas that he would take an interest in his case, that he would see if the judge could do anything for him.

"Don't forget," said the rascal with hypocritical seriousness. "It will be a worthy deed; my partners are more to blame than I am. If there were any justice, they would have set me free already."

But his words betrayed the lack of any desire to be at liberty. He did not fare badly at all where he was; besides, he was thinking of the prestige a long term would give him, of the admiration with which he would be greeted when he regained his freedom by the scoundrels who live in the caves around Madrid.

When Isidro returned home, it seemed as if his visit to the gaol had been a dream. His brother, a piece of his own flesh, lived there with pleasure, as if his slavery had raised him above everybody else! He did not hide from Feli the bad effect his visit had had upon him.

"I'll do all I can for that rascal, although if he had his own way, he would remain where he is."

Señor José came to the house in the evenings, for he spent the days at the big building in the suburbs so as not to lose his wages.

" What news of the boy ? " he asked anxiously.

At first Isidro gave him great hopes. He thought it would be possible to get him out of gaol, thanks to a friend of his who had a friend who in turn was acquainted with the judge. Then he became pessimistic. They would demand bond, and it was not easy for them, poor people, to obtain it. Finally, he decided to give Señor José a piece of advice. Barrabas was lost. It would not matter whether he remained in gaol or was set free. They really would do him a favour if they kept him in gaol, for that would prevent him from breaking the law again.

The mason did not go back to Maltrana's house. In spite of his upright nature, he felt offended at such lack of faith in Barrabas' regeneration, although he was the very first to doubt his salvation.

Isidro almost forgot his brother. Other troubles occupied his mind. He wanted to put an end to his miserable situation before the money from the Marquis of Jimenez's book—managed by Feli with strictest economy—should give out.

From time to time, a translation given him by a friend, or an article which he managed to place with some illustrated magazine managed to stop the rapid decline of his fortune. But that was not enough ; he lacked a steady sure income that would suffice for his needs.

At one time he thought that by some extraordinary effort he might join the editorial staff of some paper. . . . It was difficult to do ; all the places were filled, and he was not very well fitted for that kind of work. Besides, the fame of the indolent Homer had spread to all the editorial rooms in the city.

At moments he trusted his salvation to very original books that came to his mind and which, according to him, were bound to create a sensation. But, who was going to print them ? And where was he going to find the strength to write them when his mind was worried by his precarious resources ? . . .

He began to doubt his strength. The faith of his short period of ease, when he believed in his astonishing ascent

to fame and glory, had vanished. In his despair, he thought that he was a miserable wretch, with less talent than a labourer, and that he had been doomed to poverty. The threadbare genteel clothes which covered his body with the livery of hunger. He went into his room and lay on the bed, sad, shivering, hiding his face in his hands, as if he had been threatened by some misfortune. Poor Feli came to him stammering with fear :

" What ails you, Isidrin ? What's the matter with you, dearest ? "

She caressed him like a mother and thrust her fingers into his ruffled locks, while Maltrana answered amidst sighs. Nothing, there was nothing the matter with him ; a headache ; he was tired with working, he was sick of things.

He groaned with his helplessness, while sweet Feli shed tears at his side without asking for other explanations, guessing with feminine instinct that this crisis was closely related to the little pile of money, which was gradually decreasing, that she kept in the bureau.

Youth and the loving contact of their bodies finally managed to dry their tears. They embraced each other while their eyes were still damp, feeling the need of getting closer together and presenting a solid front to misfortune. Kisses followed their tears, and they gave themselves up to love, still haunted by a melancholy that added new zest to their pleasure.

Maltrana retired home later and later every evening. The timid Feli had had to conquer her fear of the deserted rooms and of the terrifying images Señor Vicente kept.

She sewed until eleven o'clock by the light of a lamp purchased at El Rastro. When Señor Vicente came home and saw the light shining under the door, he gently knocked with his knuckles.

" Hasn't Señor Maltrana come home yet ? "

When he learned that Feli was alone, he refused to come into the room. It was late and he had to get up at dawn.

" Keep on with your work, madam, and I hope you'll sleep well to-night. Ah ! If you have a moment to spare

and you wish to rest from your work, read that pretty prayer I gave you. You can gain eighty days indulgence."

Feli listened to the noise of his shoes, as they dropped on the floor, and to the signs and prayers of the pious man. Then came the yells of the nightmare and the invectives to the Evil One, ordering him away with his carnal temptations.

Feli went to bed after midnight, waiting in the dark for Isidro's return, thinking that it was he whenever she heard a step on the stairs. Many a time she fell asleep utterly exhausted, waking at the violent light in her eyes.

Isidro, looking very tired, undressed near the bed. What time was it? Three o'clock; four o'clock. The young man excused himself for being late, talking about the duties of a writer and the exigencies of the profession. He had to mix with people, he needed to frequent the literary coteries at Fornos, to call at a few editorial rooms and to take a walk with certain friends of his, of nocturnal habits, who might be useful to him. He loved her as much as ever, but he belonged to literature and the public.

One evening, he attended a banquet in honour of a friend who had published a volume of verses. It was a festival by the younger element to display their strength and cohesion so as to annoy the older writers. Feli brushed his suit of clothes very carefully, sprinkled his handkerchief with a few drops of perfume that remained in the bottom of the bottle, and added a couple of *pesetas*, in case something might happen, to the *duro*—the price of the cover—which she gave him from what she called "their capital," a sadly diminishing quantity.

It was three o'clock in the morning when Feli was awakened by the contact of two hands on her brow. Isidro's face leaned above her, transfigured, with red cheeks and eyes shining with extraordinary brilliancy. She then perceived the perfume of withered flowers and saw scattered over the bed several bouquets which must have adorned a table when the banquet started.

. . . . . .

'Hurrah for art!" shouted Maltrana so excited that

Feli laughed at him. "Hurrah for eternal beauty! Hurrah for triumphant youth!"

"Shut up, you crazy fool!" exclaimed the girl. "If you want to shout, shout hurrah for wine! because, if I am not mistaken, you are a little bit tipsy."

"Yes, I am intoxicated, really. I am intoxicated with enthusiasm, with life, with inspiration. The future is ours, kid; we, the younger element, shall triumph. You are Beauty, you are the muse of youth. Allow me to cover you with flowers."

And laughing like a mischievous boy, he threw the posies at her face.

"Isidro, my boy," protested Feli, "you'll waken Señor Vicente. . . ."

"Let that sacristan rot, let the old bigot go to the deuce. Down with the Church! Long live Art and Youth!"

His merry drunkenness made him look at Feli with amorous eyes. How handsome she seemed to him as she lay in her bed with her hair all tousled and her cheeks afire, displaying her bosom, of the soft paleness of a camelia, through the lace of her chemise, and crossing her ivory arms behind her head. She was the muse of youth. Isidro kissed her on her face, on her shoulders, on her breasts, on all the adorable spots of flesh that the girl uncovered as she twisted herself in the bed, shaking under the flood of caresses that made her laugh and groan with the unendurable tickling to which she was being subjected.

"Leave me alone, bad man," she moaned, laughing. "Leave me alone or I'll scream."

Maltrana continued to kiss her, interrupting his caresses with passionate words.

"Scream all you want . . . but I won't leave you alone. I want to murder you, I want to kill you with kisses. . . . I adore you. You are the Venus of Milo. . . . No, not of Milo, how idiotic! She has no arms, and yours are very pretty. You are the Venus of Medici, the Venus of Canova, the Venus Capitolina. Yes, that's it! . . . the Venus Capitolina, for she is the smartest and handsomest of all the

Venuses. . . . Let me kiss you, let me adore you on my knees."

And impelled by his drunken fit, he tried to kneel down and kiss one of her legs that showed through the bed clothes.

Feli smiled at her lover's antics. She was pleased to see him happy. She had gone to sleep thinking that she would have to tell him something . . . something very important.

Maltrana bent over so as to hear better.

"Come on ; tell me what is it."

But Feli refused to speak, hiding her face as her cheeks became intensely red. No ; she did not want to speak then. She was afraid someone might hear her, she feared that her words might reach the ears of the pious man who slept on the other side of the partition.

She extended her arms to seize Isidro's head and brought it near her mouth. She spoke into his ear for a long time, in childish talk.

When Maltrana raised himself again, his eyes had lost their brilliancy. The smiling gesture of his drunken fit had disappeared ; he had lost all desire to shout hurrahs for youth and art.

Fatherhood had suddenly thrown across his path of love an insurmountable obstacle of worries, grave attachments and painful duties.

A child of his own ! . . . Good-bye, Youth. Maltrana thought that the leaden cloak of the years had fallen on his shoulders ; he saw the poverty in which he lived blacker and sadder.

It was an indefinable feeling in which pride and fear were mixed together. His personality was going to unfold itself, prolonging itself in the course of life. That made him a man. But he thought he felt around him something that had become detached from him. The happy youth, without responsibilities or duties, was gone for ever. Away, far away, Hope, in full flight, clapped her diamond wings.

CHAPTER VIII

MALTRANA underwent a great change. The money was disappearing and his occasional earnings were not enough for the upkeep of the home. Feli seemed to him less attractive than formerly. She treated him with the same love as formerly, caring for him and petting him with the adoration of a devotee rather than the affection of a lover, but she suffered from fits of inexplicable sadness that seemed to communicate themselves to him.

Many a time, when Isidro returned home, he found her prone on the bed, crying silently.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked angrily. "What's wrong with you? . . ."

Nothing; she cried and did not know why. Her condition disturbed her weak organism. She felt possessed by an intense sadness that tortured her imagination. She thought of the mysterious being she carried within herself and wondered what would be its luck when it came into the world; she worried about the poverty that surrounded and threatened them with all sorts of privations.

Isidro discovered in her glances a disconcerting curiosity as if she saw him for the first time, as if she examined him under a new light, finding him entirely changed. Feli was beginning to doubt him; her faith in him was gradually crumbling away. As if her condition sharpened her reasoning powers, the girl asked herself if Isidro were as great a man as she had thought him; if there were not something lacking in that irresolute restless man who had no inclination for work and who even when poverty threatened them, spent a great part of the day oblivious of his situation, speaking in the Atheneum and the cafés about

the future of the younger writers and the decadence of the older ones, and about what art really ought to be, announcing in a loud voice that he was going to write some great things, but who never had the strength to take up the pen, always lacking the necessary backbone to stick to his work.

All these thoughts, which passed but vaguely through Feli's mind, Isidro could guess in her glances. On his part, finding himself criticized, rather than admired, he confessed to himself that his love for her was beginning to decline and that there was more of gratitude in it than of an irresistible passion. He loved Feli now with a new affection, placid and quiet. Of the passionate lover who knelt down before her with the intoxication of the flesh and called her Venus, very little was left. Poor Venus! The goddess was being deformed by her condition. A monstrous swelling broke the harmony of her lines and dilated her adorable curves. Those lemon-covered boots that were Feli's pride, would no longer go on her feet. The girl suffered from nausea, fainting fits and nervous attacks, and Maltrana, with the egotism of a superior man, abandoned the house and sought the pleasant company of his friends.

Feli's abnormal condition coincided with an event that made Isidro fear for her life. One morning, Señor Manolo came to the house. Feli, who had not seen him since she ran away from her father's house, received him with demonstrations of love. And how about her father? . . . But Señor Manolo hardly answered. He wanted to talk with Isidro about something very important; he wanted him to come down to the street so that they could talk more freely.

Maltrana followed him downstairs, guessing from the dour mien of the foreman that something untoward had taken place.

"Haven't you read to-day's newspapers yet?" he asked as they reached the pavement. "Well, then, Mosco has died, or rather, they have killed him. The keepers have got at last what they wanted."

And he related his brother's tragic death. The papers had devoted to the item but a few lines. That homicide,

in the royal preserves, awakened no interest. Mosco and his assistant, Chispas, had fallen into an ambush prepared by the keepers. The master had fallen riddled with lead ; his disciple and companion was in the hospital with two bullets in one shoulder. Some papers, giving an account of the event, said that the victims were dangerous poachers who had faced the keepers ; the opposition papers stated that they were some miserable beggars who had entered the royal preserves with the sole object of gathering a few thistles.

" The thing happened night before last," continued the foreman. " I found out about it yesterday afternoon ; they came from Carolinas to tell me. . . . I haven't been to see him ; I don't want to. What's the use ? Can I bring him back to life ? . . . He must be buried by this time ; those who saw him say that he was in an awful mess. a bullet in the forehead, another in the mouth ; lead everywhere. His friends could hardly recognize him, he was so disfigured. God ! Is that the way to kill a man ? Goodness knows how many of them got together ; they knew the place he was going to pass, and hiding at ease behind the bushes, they let him have a broadside before the poor fellow could shoulder his own gun. . . . Now they'll be happy ! They won't have to worry about Mosco any more ! He was a nightmare to them ! . . . And poor Chispas, as soon as he gets better, if he gets better, will go to hard labour. . . . It makes me crazy, Isidro, to think that such manly men can die like dogs, just because they want to live off what other people don't need ; that they should be hunted like wild beasts simply because they have caught a few rabbits. . . . Damnation ! And then they wonder at our shouting for the revolution ! . . ."

Mosco's death made a deep impression on Maltrana. He remorsefully thought that perhaps he was partly to blame for the catastrophe. The poacher, impelled by his anger, had undertaken risky expeditions, as if to defy death. Isidro then thought of Feli, enfeebled by her condition, and of the danger in imparting the news to her without impairing her health by a new crisis.

When he went up again, Feli was waiting for him with solemn face and inquiring glance, as if her feminine instinct had warned her of the misfortune. Only a momentous matter could have decided her uncle to pay them a visit. Was it about her father? Had she guessed right? Had he finally decided to seek them! Was he going to come and see them soon? . . .

The subterfuges employed by Maltrana in his answers served to sharpen her instinct. She suddenly guessed the truth.

"Say no more, Isidro," she murmured. "Don't try to deceive me; don't be afraid about me. I am strong. Have they killed him in the woods? . . ."

She calmly received the sad news. Maltrana admired her firmness. She was a worthy daughter of Mosco. That feeble little woman who many a time cried for no reason whatever, remained still, her eyes perfectly dry, when she learned the misfortune.

For a long time she had had forebodings of the sad end. Many a night she had seen her father in her dreams covered with blood, dying under the keepers' guns. She had familiarized herself with the possibility of such a happening during the years she had lived with the poacher in Carolinas.

She hardly cried. She stood stunned, stupefied by the surprise. When Maltrana came home that night, he found her with her eyes reddened, as if she had felt the intensity of her misfortune more keenly when left alone and had cried freely for hours and hours.

A question seemed to hang on her lips, torturing her with cruel misgivings.

"Do you think, Isidro," she said at last, "that we are somewhat to blame for father's death?"

The same question had troubled Maltrana's mind, but he hastened to reassure the girl. No; they had no responsibility whatever. Mosco had died because he was too reckless. It was a logical end to a life of adventures, to a daring way of earning a living, risking one's own skin. Had she not seen him many a time arriving at the hut dripping with blood from his terrific wounds? . . .

Feli seemed to be comforted, but continued to cry whenever she was left alone. Señor Manolo came to the house several times to inform the young couple about the scanty inheritance left by Mosco. He was selling to the people of Tetuan the poacher's famous dogs, his hunting paraphernalia and everything that was left in the house at Carolinas. He managed to gather some sixty *duros* which he gave to Feli, and which she kept without saying a word to Isidro. They certainly needed the money. The hot weather had come and their winter apparel, although threadbare, was suffocating them with its weight. They bought mourning in the cheap stores of Toledo Street.

In this second purchase, Feli considered none of her whims. Why try to adorn herself? Her condition distorted her weak and feeble body. Weeks and weeks passed in which she did not leave her room, even stick her head out of a window. She did not have enough strength to dress herself. Only with a supreme effort did she manage to go to the kitchen, and there, coughing and shaking with nausea, to prepare the meals.

Though she had previously taken scrupulous care of Isidro's clothes, being very keen that he should stand out among his companions for his neat appearance, now she let him go out without even looking at his greasy collars and mud-bespattered trousers.

Her only desire was that Isidro should go out, that she should be left alone; and sitting down in the old armchair her lover occupied when he wrote, she remained motionless for hours and hours.

In the early evening, when Feli was alone, Señor Vicente came for a few moments into his tenants' rooms. As the young woman had a few messages for him, the pious man was bold enough to come into her room.

When he was away, some of his friends used to come to the house asking for him—an old priest of threadbare, greenish-black habit, several brethren and that terrible shoemaker whose conversion had cost him the best years of his life. All were good and pious people worthy of the greatest praise from the pious man.

He listened to her explanations shaking his head slightly.

So-and-so had said that he should not fail to go to the church of Santa Cruz the following morning, for the funeral of a gentleman of the Catholic Conferences would be held there. The old priest had left in his room two parcels of leaflets for distribution. The shoemaker, with his disagreeable face, had been at the house twice asking for him very insistently. He probably wanted money ; that conversion was costing him a lot.

Señor Vicente listened to her, smiling, and then looked at her body.

" And how are you to-day ? How are you progressing ? " . . .

Since he had first seen her in that condition, he had spoken to her with more confidence. Disfigured by the swelling, heavy and sore, unable to move without groans of pain, she no longer inspired him with that fear he always experienced before every female. Her painful maternity sanctified her and allowed him to approach her without fear and without repugnance, treating her with paternal simplicity.

" You must suffer a lot. Some nights I hear you turning in your bed. . . . Be patient ; it is the punishment God inflicted upon us because of the first woman's disobedience. We must all suffer through her fault."

Feli consulted him with innocent confidence, as if she had been talking to a midwife. Señor Vicente was not a man ; his religious madness excluded him from sex.

He asked Feli certain questions which she answered with no little surprise. Did the being she carried in her womb never say anything to her ? Had it never spoken to her or expressed its will by means of mysterious noises ? . . .

" You make a mistake," he continued, " if you think I'm asking you those questions for the sake of talking. Although I am a layman, I have read quite a little. I have in there a life of Saint Vincent Ferrer, my illustrious patron, whom his panegyrist rightly calls ' the Spanish Saint Paul.' Don't you imagine that it is a book like the ones they make now-a-days ; no, it is a parchment bound volume printed

centuries ago, and its author is the Reverend Father Valdecebro, a worthy man, famous for his writings on the lives of animals. . . . Well, then, Father Valdecebro tells about the saint's mother, that when she was pregnant she felt very much worried and frightened at her enormous belly and at the noises the child made. Some nights she thought she heard barkings within her womb, and full of fear, she went to consult the archbishop of Valencia, who was a holy and prudent man, about her case. 'Do not be afraid, woman,' said the prelate. 'If your child barks within your womb, it is because God wants him to be the great mastiff of the Church that will fight with the wolves of heresy.' That is the way Father Valdecebro tells the story, and he was a learned man, incapable of telling a lie. The kindness of the Lord is inexhaustible. Who knows but He wants to repeat His wondrous work in yourself, arranging things so that another mastiff will issue from your belly to defend His flock! . . ."

Feli felt sorry at the pious man's simple-mindedness, but resented, at the same time, the animal mission which he assigned to the son of her womb.

"This one, Señor Vicente," she said, "this one has not imitated your patron saint so far; he isn't barking yet."

"Have faith in the kindness of the Lord," continued Señor Vicente. "Everything will come in good time; as soon as your call comes, I'll bring you certain miraculous relics, which I'll borrow from a friend of mine, and a ribbon from the Virgin that works wonders."

Summer had started. Isidro swore in despair when he discovered that everyone who could help him was leaving Madrid. He could find no work; publishers were curtailing their output; no translators needed help; the illustrated weeklies filled their pages with pictures of the King and the aristocracy enjoying their vacation at the northern beaches, leaving no room for a miserable article.

All the evil odours of Madrid, dormant during the winter, awoke and revived as the heat began. The stables and cow-stalls smelled with the fermentation of dung; the sewers exhaled a putrid vapour from the refuse they carried.

The street was noisier than during the rest of the year. Children seemed to spring up from the very cracks in the pavement and noisy groups occupied the pavements, giving themselves up to their games with as much freedom as if they had been in a village. The balconies—opened because of the heat—allowed a free passage to the thunderous rolling of the cabs, the shouts of the hawkers, the piercing screech of whetstones, from perambulating knife sharpeners, that set one's teeth on edge, the racket of the itinerant and indefatigable barrel-organ which causes an epidemic of headaches around it. As if expanded by the heat, the street seemed to penetrate by every opening, introducing its stench and noise to the most secluded corners of the houses.

The rooms occupied by the young couple were burning from morning till night under the rays of the sun. From the roof came a suffocating heat, as if there had been an oven on top. Feli, scantily clothed, sweating and panting, trailed her feet from place to place oppressed by the heat, which was a new torture to her. During the night, the furniture and the shelves where the pious man kept his dusty, moth-eaten books, creaked in an awesome fashion. The overheated walls released the summer parasites. Bed-bugs dropped from the ceiling, fleas jumped on the glazed bricks. Señor Vicente could not shift his books without disturbing a host of repulsive cockroaches which hurriedly scattered in all directions.

Feli felt her nausea increase and her appetite diminish at the disgusting awakening that surrounded her.

She ate almost nothing. The lack of money, the worries caused by their poverty, diminished her already feeble forces. Maltrana could see her wilting, losing the sprightliness of her youth, as if the hidden being she carried sapped all her strength.

The young man also suffered from fits of depression. He came home with a dejected countenance and let himself drop on the bed, saying that he wished he were dead. He could find no work. He went from place to place visiting his friends, calling at the editorial rooms but obtained no

translation and did not succeed in having an article accepted. Life was paralysed ; everyone who might have given him something was away from the city.

He had sought the Marquis of Jimenez, hoping to induce him to do another book, but the grave personage was also absent ; spending the summer on one of his estates and intending to remain there until the winter.

During those fits of depression, Isidro realized to its full extent the precariousness of his situation. His arms were weak, his hands delicate ; he did not have even the physical stamina to earn his living as a labourer.

He remembered with bitterness the speeches he had read many times about the poverty of the working classes. Ah ! They, at any rate, did not die of hunger in the middle of the street. The working man could always find a chunk of bread and a glass of wine to keep him alive. But, what was going to become of him, poisoned as he was by a useless education, lacking the brute force with which the unfortunate labourers earn their bread and butter ? . . .

In those moments of despair, he remembered *El Bachiller*, by Julio Valles, one of the works that had made a deep impression on his mind, for in it he saw the story of his own existence faithfully told. He recollected the dedication, heartrending, full of immense sadness : " To all those who, fed on Greek and Latin, are starving with hunger."

He belonged to that legion of wretches whose plaints found no echo, whose genteel clothes made them blush and tremble as they begged for a piece of bread, who made people laugh with their grotesque poverty and did not inspire fear, as did the ordinary working men.

For the first time Maltrana thought that perhaps the greatest mistake of his life had been to allow himself to be wrenched from the humble station in which he had been born ; that the kind lady who had protected him had perhaps been unwittingly the bad fairy of his destiny ; that he might be condemned to everlasting hunger for having aspired to fame, for having adopted the dress of a Bohemian when his salvation lay in donning the clothes of a working man, as his forebears had done.

In spite of her weakness, Feli found strength to encourage him. The money was coming to an end and they did not have any hopes of obtaining more. But she would help out ; she was used to work.

And the poor girl, anæmic through lack of food, made a superhuman effort, one of those efforts rendered possible by feminine nerve force alone. She could not go back to the cap factory ; it was too far away and, besides, they would not take her after the scandal of her elopement. But she knew other minor trades which are accessible to poor young women and help them to cheat their hunger. She would put the stays in corsets. She was still friendly with the boss of a shop which had given her work when business in the cap factory was slack.

Isidro was opposed to the plan. Feli working while he was forced to remain idle ! Working when her illness and physical condition obliged her to remain motionless for hours at a time ! . . . Good-bye idyl ! Maltrana thought that his amorous happiness would vanish forever if those beautiful hands of hers were subjected to the slavery of earning a wage. The cogs of poverty grab their victims and never let go. If she started to work, she would have to work always ; neither happiness nor plenty would return to their little home. Better that they should both die of hunger than to see adored sweet Feli degrading herself with the hardships of a factory hand. She was a lady ; she was the wife of a writer.

The girl shrugged her shoulders at his protests. Her feminine good sense led her to disregard his objections, and one night, when Maltrana came home, he found the room full of modest white corsets, such as poor people wear, which Feli had brought from the workshop. She spent hours and hours bending over the pieces of cloth. She made the triangular stitches that adorn the edges of the stays. It was hard and poorly paid, as most women's jobs are.

Isidro was very cross. Did she want to kill herself ? But Feli's smile quieted his objections. She glanced towards the bureau drawer where she kept their money.

Only a few *pesetas* remained of what Uncle Manolo had brought them. They had not paid Señor Vicente the rent for the last two months; they owed money to the shops in their street; Maltrana would have to do without the *pesetas* she used to give him now and then for tobacco; he would have to give up the banquets of the "younger writers," the expenses he considered necessary "to make himself known" and to "maintain his literary reputation."

Poverty, real, black, truceless, ruthless poverty was approaching. Feli had no doubts about it; she opened her eyes wide, full of mystery, as if she could see it prowling around them. The being she carried in her womb also seemed to feel its proximity. It became more and more restless and the mother cried, thinking of its fate. Poverty would be the only fairy that would embrace it upon its appearance in the world. If fate did not have pity on them, she would rather have the innocent being perish in its prison before she should see it, before she should become enslaved by her love for it.

She devoted herself to her work with feminine courage, displaying an endurance of which only nervous persons are capable. When Maltrana wakened in the morning, he saw Feli before a heap of corsets sewing courageously. She held her emaciated face down and watched the needle closely with her deep, melancholy eyes, the beauty of which had alone suffered no change. As he came home late at night Isidro found it difficult to make her go to bed.

"Let me finish this dozen," she would say without raising her head, intent on her work, unwilling to waste one single second.

Maltrana felt ashamed at her sacrifice. In the streets, he remorsefully thought of Feli. It was abominable that he should walk idly about while the poor girl worked her head off in that oven-like atmosphere. He felt the duty of keeping her company; he thought that his presence would somewhat disguise his ignominious situation. Returning home, he shifted from one chair to another, reading, writing, talking to hide his weariness. Sometimes, when he had no books of his own, for he had sold those that were

of any value, he brought one out of Señor Vicente's library and tried to laugh at the pious extravagances of the lives of the saints. But it was no time for jokes, and he returned the moth-eaten tome to its shelf. On other days, he felt a desire to work and thus bring himself up to the level of his brave companion. He was going to do something remarkable ; his head was full of ideas. Sitting down at the table, he dipped his pen in the ink-pot and passed his hand over his forehead ; but behind him the needle sang as it pierced the cloth and the corsets rustled as they were heaped up ; around his head some flies buzzed, and the suffocating heat of the room covered his skin with beads of sweat. He tore one sheet of paper after another, finally throwing the pen away with a violent gesture. Inspiration fled, frightened by the noise of the rustling cloth and the buzzing of the pesky insects. It was impossible to accomplish anything, and he nervously walked around the room, swearing that he was a fool until Feli, annoyed at his temper, begged him to go out and try to enjoy himself.

Isidro, ashamed of his idleness, and seeing that he could do nothing else, made it a point to accompany her when she returned the corsets to the shop. The first time, he had allowed poor Feli to carry the parcel to the Puerta del Sol although she could hardly walk. He was an intellectual who had many friends, and although most of them were out of town, he was afraid someone might see him loaded with the parcel. It was an egotistic scruple, a desire to maintain his prestige as an unfortunate great man who keeps his dignity in the face of poverty. But when he saw Feli bundling up her work the second time, panting with fatigue, resigned, smiling sadly, he felt deep remorse.

" Let it alone, kid," he murmured blushing with shame. " I'll tie it up ; I'll carry it to the door of the shop. It is a crime to allow you to go alone."

The poor girl girl wanted to refuse his help. He was a gentleman, an intellectual, a future personage. What would his friends, his companions at the café say if they saw him on the street loaded like a porter? . . . But in spite of the horror he felt at the idea of meeting his friends Isidro

made a gesture of indifference. Let them say what they wished ; he wanted to help her, he wanted to be useful to her.

They went out every two days, shortly after nightfall, loaded with the parcels, and Feli received a few *reales* for her work. Maltrana walked close to the wall, somewhat ashamed of himself, hiding his face, looking at the passers-by out of the corner of his eye to see if he could recognize any of them. In spite of the wretched condition of her legs, Feli endeavoured to keep up with his rapid steps, for he seemed to be running away. She panted as she trotted along.

When they did not bring home any new work, their return trip was slower and quieter. They walked arm in arm along the pavements that still retained some of the heat of the day. The city steamed in the calmness of the night, exhaling the warmth with which the sun had fired it up. The streets were less crowded than during the rest of the year. The balconies were closed ; scarcely a lighted window could be seen in the black walls of the buildings. The tables outside the cafés were crowded. Groups of neighbours sat chatting in front of the doors, obstructing the pavements. From many windows hung earthenware bottles oozing with water. A stench of heated asphalt and fermenting dung rose from the wide streets. Near Señor Vicente's house, in the narrow streets of the poorer quarters, the evil smell of summer tortured the nostrils. From the ill-ventilated basements came a pestiferous odour of decaying vegetables, making that part of Madrid smell like an abandoned vegetable garden.

On their slow return home, the two lovers discussed the uses to which the money just received—hardly sufficient for their most elementary needs—was to be put. Feli received fifty *centimos* for each dozen corsets. Even if she worked night and day she could hardly make a couple of *pesetas*. They went over their accounts mentally ; so much for the market and so much for the grocer. The money was not enough to pull them out of the hole they were in, in spite of the fact that they had given up coffee

and wine and ate only enough to keep body and soul together.

As Maltrana listened to the housekeeper's plaints, he nostalgically thought of the past. How sweet the remembrance of the walks in the neighbourhood of Canalillo, of the halts in the picnic grounds of Amaniel, talking of love, passing oranges from mouth to mouth, happy because the light of the sun filled their souls with joy, glad of the night because it protected them with its shadows and added new charm to their caresses by the music of the nocturnal echoes! . . . Everything had fled forever; it was all far away, as far as that Feli of the good days, joyful, smiling, and overflowing with admiration, was from the present Feli, disfigured by maternity, saddened by poverty, and with an air of discouragement, as if she no longer had any faith in the future of her lover, and had resigned herself to bear the greater part of their troubles, looking after him as if he were an overgrown child, more through maternal pity than through passionate affection.

Maltrana no longer pondered whether life was merry or sad, grey or pink. Life was simply a bore, and Hellenism a literary fake. Those Athenians without money, without hope, and with a beloved female whom they had to support, must have seen everything of a greyish hue, even if the sun played on the waters of the Piræus, even if the marbles of the Parthenon shone with a divine smile, and the rhapsodists kept blowing on their sweet flutes. Poverty was a monster of unsurpassed ugliness. No art in the world could beautify its horrible mask.

One evening, passing the Puerta del Sol, they heard the cries of the newsvendors about "a horrible catastrophe" which had taken place that morning, and in which innumerable people had been killed and wounded.

Isidro had stayed at home all day writing a few sheets, at ten *centimos* each, for the weekly paper which required his collaboration as irregularly as its issues were published. Feli felt attracted by the event, with that curiosity which terrifying happenings awaken in the feminine mind.

They bought a newspaper and Maltrana read the big

headlines by the light of a street lamp. The building on which Señor José worked had collapsed early in the morning. Maltrana instantly had a presentiment of the misfortune. Before reading on, he felt sure that his step-father had perished among the ruins of the scandalously disgraceful building which had upset the ideas of the law-abiding ex-soldier, and had made him lose his faith in the perfection of the social structure.

Isidro looked in the paper for the names of the victims. The number of the wounded who were dying in the hospitals was very large. Only one corpse had been recovered from the ruins, that of the only workman who had died instantly —Señor José. His name and address were given with an accuracy that left no room for doubt.

Maltrana experienced a painful surprise. He remembered his mother ; he thought of the gratefulness Isidra felt for the kindnesses shown her by her companion. Poor Señor José ! Perhaps he had hoped for death—that death whose proximity he could guess as he worked in the disgraceful building which had aroused his wrath—as a deliverance. To die was the best thing that could happen to the simple man who was indignant at a world that was deviating from the right path, and against the bad luck that converted into apprentice criminals the sons of law-abiding men.

The funeral was to take place the following day. All the masons of Madrid intended to take advantage of the noon rest to attend it and convert it into a protest against the rapacity of the mighty.

Isidro wanted to accompany the body to the cemetery. It was all he could do for his step-father.

The following morning, he left by the Toledo gate a little before noon. Arriving at the bridge, he turned to the left and went towards the morgue by the river side. The rays of the sun heated the pools of the Manaznares, filled with the refuse from the sewers that empty into it. A fetid smell poisoned the dense summer atmosphere.

The neighbourhood of the morgue was occupied by groups of men in working clothes, and women who had

come from their washing places in the river, their sleeves rolled up.

They were discussing the catastrophe with angry shouts and curses. The women were the most daring and noisy. They looked towards Madrid, raising their arms with threatening expression.

"Thieves! Thieves! . . . They kill the working men to make themselves rich. . . . They care only about business and they let the poor people die like dogs."

Then they faced the men who arrived, masons—most of them—with their dinner baskets hanging from their necks. They insulted them with coarse words. Softies! They would remain, after this, as calm as ever, waiting for their turn to die in some other catastrophe. Ah! if they only wore trousers! If they were only allowed to mix themselves in men's affairs! . . . Things would be different then.

And the masons answered with a gesture of discouragement. What could they do? They were not armed; they were sick and tired of being kicked in the streets at the least protest.

"Arms! Arms!" ironically exclaimed some fiery eyed men. "What do you want them for? They are no use at all. Dynamite, God damn it! Dynamite bombs!"

Maltrana went into the morgue, elbowing his way through the working men, and saw Señor José's body on a marble table, in a modest coffin which had been paid for by his fellow workers.

According to all accounts, Señor José had broken his spine and several other bones. His face was intact, contracted by a gesture of immense pain. Isidro could see only one of his eyes, wide open, that seemed to stare at him with its glassy pupil. He thought he could read in that dull globe of funereal vagueness, the last thought of the victim, a curse that passed through his brain like a flash as he ceased to exist. He had undoubtedly died cursing all he had revered during his life. It could be read in the contraction of his face; it was imprinted on that grimace that seemed a protest. If the corpse could come to life again, it would surely give forth some rebellious shout against unjust

society, against cruel man, demanding destruction and vengeance, and then it would lie down again in its coffin after that posthumous confession of the deception of man's life.

Some of his fellow workers spoke near the corpse. They would not call him sheep any longer. He loved the exploiters more than he did his fellow wretches. Misfortune, always blind, had seen quite clearly this time when it had punished him through the avarice of those whom he defended. Poor fellow! Anyway, he was one of them; one more victim for whom they had to protest.

Maltrana saw Señor José no more. His fellow workers nailed down the coffin and placed over it the red flag of the federation.

The bier, carried on the shoulders of a group of masons, ploughed through the tumultuous gathering. When Isidro left the morgue, following the red flag, he saw the riverside, the Toledo bridge, and the crossways, full of working men who lifted caps and hats, baring their heads as the coffin went by.

At the end of Toledo bridge, between the two stone pyramids that rest on gilt balls, he perceived a dark mass with brilliant spots, a compact row of sombre men. It was the police barring the way.

The funeral advanced without hesitation. The women yelled around the coffin, wrathful and tearful, as if the mad summer sun bit their unkempt heads.

"Thieves! Thieves! On to Madrid! To hell with the assassins! . . ."

Other women pointed to the coffin with tragic, plaintive gestures. They did not know Señor José, but they shouted, coarse with emotion:

"There goes the finest man in the world; a good workman; a real toiler. Poor fellow! And the men who have killed him get all the money! And they get the best things in the country! . . ."

The head of the procession bumped against the police. A captain spoke to the leaders. They could go along the Acacias promenade, and around Madrid along the encir-

cling boulevards, without troubling anyone. Those were the orders he had received. But they could not go into the city or through the centre, trying to reach Alcala Street. He would be there, at the Ocho Hilos promenade, to bar their way and prevent them from reaching the Toledo Gate. They could do as they pleased : shout, cry, yell, everything except parade through the streets of Madrid and let the city people see the funeral, with its retinue of working men shouting for vengeance.

As an answer to the captain, a stick, from the end of which hung a black rag that looked like a shroud, rose over the sea of heads. It was the flag of wrath and sorrow improvised by a group of young fellows.

The women yelled, protesting against the orders of the police.

" That's it ; we've got to go around, as if we were cattle. . . . The poor people must go to the stable. No funerals can pass through the streets of Madrid except those of the big men who die of surfeit or of filthy vices. The streets are only for motor-cars and carriages. We've got to go around . . . because we stink. . . . To hell with the thieves ! To hell with them ! On to Madrid ! On to Madrid ! "

And the women were the first to advance, seizing the corners of the coffin and pushing the bearers so that they would break the row of policemen.

The policemen withdrew, facing, however, the mighty push, and at the same time, through force of habit, began to draw their swords even before their chief had given them the order. Many seemed to complain with their eyes at the waste of time entailed by the parleys between the captain and the procession. What on earth were they doing that they did not begin to strike ? That was what they were there for.

Isidro could not tell how the struggle started. Suddenly, the mob wheeled about in front of the coffin ; there were yells and dull blows, as when clothes are beaten. Above the heads of the crowd the heavy swords, edges downward, shone in the sun, like white ribbons.

The mob opened up and fled in all directions. In an instant, the tragic empty space between those who flee and those who strike was formed, with a few abandoned caps and the dark form of a man trying to rise on his hands, his forehead bathed in blood.

Fewer women than men ran. Some stopped, and with their arms akimbo let out a strings of oaths suggested by their excited imagination.

"Cowards! Skunks! . . ."

As if they knew the history and family of each policeman, they cast their vileness in their teeth. They were there butchering the poor workers while their wives were having assignations with other men. . . . And after relieving themselves of that insult, they ran again when they saw the policemen coming close to them, their swords in the air.

But the swords did not irritate the mob quite so much as the blows from the sticks of certain men in civilian clothes who had come to the funeral and were listening to what was being said in the groups and who, as soon as the fight began, pulled out their sticks and started to lay on around them. The mob was furious with the blackguards of the secret police.

A group of young fellows, posted in the neighbouring lots, faced the police with all the arrogance of youth. They were the brave fellows who rise in every rebellion, the street heroes who are praised by the greatest poets when a revolution triumphs, or go to gaol with ordinary thieves when they take part in an ordinary riot.

"Rifles!" they yelled, looking at one another as if they could find the weapons among themselves. "If we only had rifles! . . ."

And there was in their attitude a heroic expression, a determination to die killing, to pursue their enemies into the centre of Madrid. For lack of arms, they picked up stones, broken bricks, tin cans, old shoes, and showered the police with the heterogeneous missiles. Accustomed as they were to clubbing defenceless mobs, the policemen did not know what to do, hesitating before a resolute enemy who, not satisfied with facing them, advanced audaciously.

Something like the crack of a whip sounded. The captain had fired his revolver.

"Fire! God damn your hides! Fire!"

The policemen fired, advancing with heroic step, deliberately choosing their targets from among the backs that fled in all directions.

Maltrana thought of Señor José. His funeral was worthy of the beliefs he had held during his life. Nothing was lacking in it: blows for the mob, indiscriminate firing with voluptuous pleasure on the part of the upholders of the law, who chose their victims with impunity.

The young man did not wish to flee; he remained near the coffin, foreseeing that there would be the safest place for him. Besides, he was the only relative at the funeral and he ought not to abandon the corpse. When the bearers of the coffin felt the first blows, they dropped it and fled as fast as they could run. The red flag had disappeared in the flight. Other workers attempted to seize the coffin and raise it, but were chased by the police. That black box was like a standard of rebellion around which a new uprising could be organized. In the throes of the struggle, the coffin was almost upset and the corpse very nearly thrown into the dusty road.

Afraid of a new profanation, Isidro sat down on the coffin, bent over, stupefied and frightened by thunderous volleys. A man in working clothes also came to sit on the coffin, as if it were a place of refuge.

Maltrana heard a groan and saw the working-man, dripping with blood, reel and drop on the ground. Then a sword flashed over his head and he crouched still lower to avoid the blow.

But nobody touched him. A few seconds, that seemed endless to him, passed, but his body did not feel a single blow. He thought he heard a voice, the voice of some black ghosts who, sword in hand and firing shots, passed before his frightened eyes that saw everything enveloped in thick fog.

"Leave him alone; don't you see he is a gentleman?"

. . . . . .

For the first time in his life, he realized the advantages and privileges of the clothes he wore, which to him were the livery of poverty.

He suffered privations ; hunger had marked him out as one of its slaves ; but he belonged, by appearance and habits, to the happy race. He was a gentleman. He was above those people who conquer their bread oftener than he, but who feel the caress of a stick the moment they beg, in addition to their chunk of bread, a little justice and pity for their condition.

CHAPTER IX

A TYRANT whose exactions he patiently bore ruled Brother Vicente—the convert shoemaker, who brought to his new faith the violence of his former disgraceful life. He scared his benefactor with the bloodthirsty aspect of his pious vehemence. There was no truth except religious truth, and if anyone should refuse to accept it, to hell with him! A little Inquisition would not be a bad thing in these times of heretics and despisers of God. It was the ardour of a neophyte that frightens the master, the audacity of a renegade who wants to obliterate with tremendous exaggerations the remembrance of his past.

Besides, he felt he had an absolute right over the person and property of his catechizer, and he looked with hostility upon the couple who lived with Señor Vicente, suspecting that they were depriving him of something that he considered belonged to him.

He never spoke to Vicente that he did not question him about the couple, minutely informing himself as to the way in which they discharged their obligations.

"I bet they haven't paid you the rent for last month!" he said as he saw the saint. "Nor for the previous month either! . . . And you, as calm as could be! What a man, my Lord! . . . That isn't charity, Señor Vicente; that's foolishness. Charity begins with good people, with those who defend the holy doctrines. It is a shame that you should pay for those people while you abandon me, although I have a family, and am your son, and live like a good Catholic."

The brother excused himself timorously, scraping his pockets in order to stifle with a present the protests of his terrible disciple.

"They are not bad people at all," asserted Señor Vicente referring to his tenants. "The poor couple are very unlucky, and they ought to be helped. She is an excellent girl, so energetic . . . so mannerly. . . ."

"But they don't go to mass, Don Vicente; watch, and you'll see that they never go to any church. He is a heretic who has written in the vilest newspapers. Go into his room some day, look carefully around and you will find heaps of his writings against the Lord and the saints. . . . Besides, I have an idea that they are not married; that couple do not live according to God's law."

The credulous brother protested. His disciple was committing a sin in gossiping; he thought evil of everybody; it was a failing from his previous sinful life. Why should they not be married? Señor Maltrana and the girl had assured him that they were, and he was bound to believe them. . . . We all should mind our own business and not mix ourselves into other people's affairs. The Lord would punish the evildoers.

"That's it," murmured the disciple. "They can go on sponging on you, eating the money that belongs to you—who are my father, while I worry myself to death over being deprived of the pleasure of going to the Forty Hours, or to the sermon, because I have to work so that my wife and children may eat a little."

"Everything will come out right in the end," the brother said kindly. "The Lord's mercy is very great and it reaches all."

Isidro guessed the shoemaker's hostility and received him with a sour face when he came to look for Señor Vicente at the house. Isidro laughed at the shoemaker's savage piety. He suspected the despotism which he exercised over Señor Vicente, the abuses he committed in his condition of a soul redeemed by the simple brother.

The young man remembered certain pictures of holy missionaries, in which they appear with a savage prostrated at their feet, as a symbol of the great conquests they have carried out for the church, and in his conversations with Feli, he always referred to the cobbler as "the Indian

convert." Repugnant to him because of the fury with which the convert defended his new beliefs, a fury comparable only to the brutality he had displayed in supporting his former ideas, he disliked the shoemaker besides, because of the profit he tried to obtain from his conversion, exploiting Señor Vicente and threatening him when the latter did not give him enough money. The poor brother, slave to his own glory, vassal to his own conquest, inspired Isidro with pity.

He spoke everywhere about his famous triumph; he exhibited "the Indian convert" as a trophy, innocently exaggerating the horrifying exploits of his heathenish times; but after this display, when the two were left alone, the insatiable convert started again to bewail his poverty, and did not stop until he was convinced that nothing remained in the holy man's pockets except some leaflets and a few bread crumbs.

"That boor has been here looking for you," Isidro said when he saw Señor Vicente coming into the house.

"'The Indian convert' . . . your disciple, the cobbler. What a brute! I bet they won't thank you up in heaven for your conquest. They'll have to fit up a stable for him, next to Saint Martin's horse or to Balaam's ass."

"Señor Maltrana," ejaculated the holy man, "pray be more charitable . . . have more love for your fellow mortals. The poor man is a little bit rough; he can't help himself; but he is all right and he loves God."

And the holy man seemed to suffer through the enmity between Isidro and the shoemaker.

The "Indian convert" was not mistaken in suspecting that his benefactor was rendering some help to his tenants. The holy man saw that Feli was working continuously; he guessed, as he peeked into their kitchen, the penury of the young couple; he heard from his bed their conversation as they discussed the problems that would face them the following day.

When Isidro was away from home, Señor Vicente very shyly approached Feli and emptied on the heap of corsets

whatever he had in his pockets—sometimes a handful of coppers, other times a *peseta* which he polished with his handkerchief before delivering it.

"I don't want Señor Maltrana to know anything about this," he said in a mysterious voice. "Let this be a secret between you and me. We must help each other, like good Christians. This money was given to me this morning by the kind ladies who protect me. It is for you! . . . You are just as poor as the unfortunates I visit in the suburbs. . . . But don't cry any more. Better days are coming. God may take you by the throat, but He never chokes you altogether."

And he laughed at his charitable trick, which was carefully kept secret, and did not even arouse the suspicions of Maltrana, who was also under obligation to the holy man.

"Señor Vicente, this makes the third month that I haven't paid you. Business is bad; in summer it is rather hard to find work; but the good times will come when everybody returns to Madrid, and then I'll pay you all my arrears at once."

"Don't worry about it, Señor Maltrana. I am not asking you for any money. If God doesn't forsake us, we'll all live happily."

Isidro found his existence harder and more difficult every day. The two *pesetas* Feli earned, working at the corsets all day long and a great part of the night, and the few *reales* he gathered every week, filling up sheets at ten *centimos* each for the sociological magazine, were not enough for even the bare necessaries of life. The order and method of the meals, which had rendered so pleasant the first period of their life together, disappeared when they became poor. Feli needed the entire time to work on the corsets, and she was very seldom able to cook.

In spite of his intellectual pride, Maltrana looked after the kitchen, and for lack of other occupations, clumsily endeavoured to learn from Feli the secrets of the art of cooking. Where were the tasty stews of their honeymoon, which had made him feel like kissing his little

housekeeper to death ? . . . Life was hard, and the stews sometimes were underdone, and sometimes burned to cinders. The weariness of poverty paralysed their activity so much that whole days passed without lighting a fire, and they ate only some cold meats brought from a neighbouring tavern.

When they were without money, Maltrana went out into the street. He likened his going down from the fourth floor, to the descent of a wolf from the hills to the plains, impelled by hunger.

The victim the unfortunate wolf preferably sought was Señor Manolo, waiting for him at the office in the Puerta del Sol. When the foreman appeared, Isidro related the wretchedness of his life. The good foreman listened with downcast eyes, shaking his head as if approving all he heard, acknowledging that Isidro was a great talker. He then thrust his hand into one of his trousers pockets, shaking the coins from the sale of the papers, and finally gave Isidro a couple of *pesetas* without any complaint whatsoever.

It was all the fault of the antiquated system.

" There you are," he said with solemn expression. "That's the result of unitarianism and centralization. You are a clever man and you are starving to death ; and there are many like you. Centralization benefits only the crooks. The day in which each state and each individual will have full autonomy, each one will get what he deserves . . . I'm telling you this so that you will learn, so that you will realize what unitarianism can do for you."

And he repaid himself for the two *pesetas* with a new avalanche of abstruse reasonings to which Maltrana resignedly listened.

At other times when they were hard up, Maltrana went to the San Millan café in search of his uncle, the Ingeniero, for he did not want to bother Señor Manolo too often. He found the Ingeniero surrounded by certain friends, as old as himself, merry pals who compiled a catalogue of all the pretty wenches living in the lower districts of the city.

The Ingeniero received his nephew's first petition rather pleasantly.

"I know what it is," he said, winking one eye and slapping Maltrana on the back. "Women! . . . There's nothing like them to make a man scratch for a *peseta*. . . . They are all spendthrifts and they are never satisfied until they suck even the marrow out of a man. . . . How much do you need? Three *pesetas?* That wouldn't pay even for a mass! Here, take a couple of *duros*. We real men have got to help each other. I give you a lift to-day, and you give me one to-morrow."

And he gave him the two silver coins with a gesture as if they had been companions in arms.

"Listen: that yarn about your marriage is bunk," he continued. "I guessed it as soon as you two spoke to me. You are a rascal, nephew! . . . And the girl is worth it; a kid with eyes like lamps. If you didn't belong to the family, I would take her away from you. You may be younger, but I have more attraction for women. These fellows will tell you."

And he pointed to his chums sitting at the same table.

Maltrana went away half grateful, half annoyed at his uncle's idiotic remarks, and did not go back until poverty forced him two weeks later.

"Hello! . . . Sit down," said the Ingeniero carelessly when he saw him.

He continued to talk to his friends, then turned to his nephew suddenly.

"The other night I saw you and the girl loaded with parcels on Toledo Street," he said. "Do you know that she doesn't look half as pretty as she used to? I can't see very well, but it seems to me that she looks rather homely, moving along like an old boat, and with her face swollen as if you had been slapping her. It even seemed to me that her eyes are not quite so big."

Maltrana silently stood his uncle's remarks, which were all the more insulting as they had been uttered in the presence of his idiotic friends. Nevertheless, he attempted to smile, thinking of the money his uncle might give him.

"I believe," continued the Ingeniero, "that it is about time for you to say good-bye. Women don't last long. They are like cigarettes: as soon as you have smoked beyond the middle, all is ashes and they have to be thrown away. Isn't that right, gentlemen?"

They all approved the Ingeniero's wisdom.

Isidro thought the moment had arrived to formulate his petition, but his uncle did not receive it as he had done previously. Isidro had lost for him his prestige as a fortunate fellow; he no longer inspired him with envy; he was a poor fool who was not clever enough to pull himself out of a hole; he was playing the goat by keeping that wench for the mere reason that he had put her in the family way.

"Take these three *pesetas;* I can't give you any more and I warn you that they are the last I shall give you. I have a good many expenses of my own and times are hard. I haven't sold the organ yet."

Realizing that he could expect nothing more from the Ingeniero, Maltrana never went back to the San Millan café.

Poverty was ruthlessly closing in upon them. Feli was exhausted; having lost the strength she had possessed during the first days, she bent over her work with a supreme effort of will, sewing on stays and embroidering the ends by hand. But hardly were a dozen finished when her face flushed up, her head seemed to go round, and she leaned back on her chair, shutting her eyes as if she were going to faint. She could do no more.

Meanwhile, their difficulties increased and life was becoming unbearable to the couple. The articles acquired in their palmy days were disappearing; little remained of their original furnishings. Isidro, more versed, through his former experience, in the art of defending oneself against poverty, undertook to dispose of their belongings. Piece by piece, he sold everything. The bedroom no longer shone with the golden splendour of that bed which had filled Feli with pride and which had witnessed the greatest happiness of the couple. They slept on the floor on a mattress, and tried to deceive themselves that they were much better

that way, since the weather was extremely hot. The inkstand, Feli's present to Isidro, had also disappeared. Its sale procured them a supper, after a long day of fasting. They ate, but Feli felt that they were less closely united than formerly. She had looked upon this object, bought on the first day of their living together, as a fetish of the happiness.

They had also sold their winter clothing and that gorgeous dress, bought in Toledo Street, which had marked the height of Feli's happiness. As for the lemon-coloured boots, with their high row of buttons—they were worth nothing; they were as shattered as the hopes of the unfortunate couple.

Maltrana, who had formerly faced poverty with the unconscious happiness of a wandering bird, now despaired of their situation, and the gloomiest thoughts crossed his mind when he saw Feli, silent and resigned, working with superhuman effort, in the cold kitchen. Not even a piece of bread was to be found in the house.

Poverty, the bad, black beast! How it tore the flesh! What disgusting suggestions it whispered into the ear! . . . Sometimes Maltrana's eyes wandered with sombre questionings around the rooms of Señor Vicente—now the best in the house, for they were full of something, while their own were horribly empty.

He felt a criminal desire to seize some of the holy man's books and sell them, to take the bleeding Christ and carry it to El Rastro to see if his cousins would buy it. He had to make a great effort to reject the temptation. The crucifix was worth only a few *reales*; most of the books, which the holy man valued very highly, were of no use, except for wrapping paper.

The anguish of poverty had soured his temper. Perhaps because of this, Señor Vicente seemed to avoid him, coming and going without seeing him, without speaking to him. He no longer went to see Feli, to leave a little money of top of the corsets.

But one afternoon, when she was alone, the "Indian convert" and the old wandering priest came to the house.

They wanted to wait for Don Vicente, and instead of remaining in the holy man's drawing-room, went into the couple's room. The " Indian convert " pointed with furious glances at the portraits hanging on the walls—the only things that remained from their former affluence. Maltrana had not attempted to sell them, for he knew they were worth almost nothing. Besides, in the midst of their poverty, they were the only evidence that an intellectual lived there.

The priest, following the direction of the " Indian convert's " glances, examined the portraits with seeming carelessness and read and re-read the names printed below, as if afraid to forget them. At the same time he gave little ironic coughs. Hugh ! hugh ! . . . And the pious cobbler shook his head as if he wanted to answer :

" Eh ! How's that ? Didn't I tell you ? . . ."

When Maltrana learned of their visit, he became furious. Had he been there, he would have thrown them into the street to teach them not to poke their noses into other people's houses.

A few days afterwards, he noticed that Señor Vicente went out later than usual, or returned home a little earlier, as if seeking a chance to speak with him. Señor Vicente looked at him through the half-open door as he went through the library muttering prayers, but he did not dare to come forward, as if afraid to meet him in Feli's presence.

One morning as Maltrana was going out, he saw Señor Vicente leaving his room at the same time, as if he had been watching for him. The two met on the landing.

" Señor Maltrana, I should like to have a few words with you."

It hurt him very much to have to say what he was going to tell him, but he really could not help himself. Maltrana should look for another place, for he was going to give up the house at the end of that very month.

" I can't, Señor Maltrana, I can't pay the rent. And, mind you, I don't mean to cast in your teeth the fact that you have not helped me. Good gracious, no. You didn't pay your share because you were unable to . . . but I am

going away. I'll find a place for my books somewhere; that priest you have seen here a few times will keep them for me. I'll go and live with the poor shoemaker; he and his family are very keen to have me with them; they want to look after me and I sadly need a little attention."

Maltrana was stunned by the new misfortune that was befalling him. Where could he go? But the nervousness caused by poverty which had soured his temper made him face the new calamity with a haughty spirit.

"Señor Vicente: you are a good man and I don't believe you capable of making this resolution all by yourself. This is a scheme of the 'Indian convert,' who wants to monopolize you, and perhaps of that priest friend of yours also. . . "

The holy man protested, defending his friends. He would not think evil of them or attribute bad intentions to them. He was going away because he could no longer afford the rent for the house. He was very sorry on account of Feli and Maltrana, whom he liked exceedingly well, and who had never disturbed him in the slightest. But they would all be happy even if they lived apart; the mercy of the Lord is infinite.

And carried away by his catechizing propensities, he added:

"What you ought to do, Señor Maltrana, is to square things up with God; to give that angel of goodness who lives with you what rightfully belongs to her; to become united to her as prescribed by the Holy Mother Church."

Isidro guessed what the brother meant to say. Señor Vicente had found out that he and Feli were not married. The "Indian convert" was quite capable of going the rounds of all the parishes in Madrid in order to convince his benefactor that he was sheltering a sinful couple given up to the lust of the flesh. Señor Vicente's mien plainly showed his loathing of living in such close contact with sin. Maltrana became enraged at his scruples.

"Whether we be married or not, what business is that of yours?" he asked in a rage. "We love each other; together we suffer poverty; we are partners in life without

need of bonds and documents. What crime is there in that ? "

The brother raised his shoulders in astonishment, shocked at the idea that anyone should doubt that sin at all. " Besides," he went on very gently, " you have deceived me, Señor Maltrana ; you have made fun of me. . . . No, I am not angry at that ! That doesn't bother me a bit ! . . . I took you in with pleasure under my roof, but I told you that I couldn't live with Voltaire, Garibaldi and other sons of the Evil One."

" Exactly," said Maltrana, smiling in spite of his rage. " And in order to please you, I abstained from bringing to the house those excellent gentlemen."

" But you brought others who are worse," replied the holy man with a little irritation, his inflamed eyes filling with tears at the same time. " And you have them in there as if they were saints, and the wonder is that you haven't placed lighted candles before them. I am an ignoramus and I thought there was no one as perverse as the two sinners I have named. But though I have little learning, there are wise and prudent persons who can enlighten me, and I know now that those who adorn your room are bigger devils, more mischievous than the others, for some of them, through some high purpose of God who wishes to put us on trial, are still alive."

" And what do you want ? " shouted Maltrana in an aggressive tone. " Do you want me to put them away just to please that cobbler who exploits you and that crazy priest who advises you ? "

" Not at all ; keep them, if that is your pleasure," answered the holy man very quietly. " You and I must not live together. You are young . . . and quite up-to-date, and I am only a little bird of God ! . . . Goodness gracious! My Christ and my books under the same roof with the greatest devils known ! . . ."

Maltrana thought it useless to prolong the conversation. The brother had made up his mind to part company with him and Maltrana did not want to plead or disclose the grievous harm his unexpected decision was causing.

"All right; there are plenty of houses. And if your moving was only a pretext to get rid of me, you can stay here peacefully with your Christ and all the stock of imbecilities contained in your library. We'll move right away, sooner than you expected."

The holy man protested, somewhat touched.

"Don't be in a hurry; you can have until the end of the month. I'll wait, and as for the arrears, forget them. I like you, Señor Maltrana, I like you because, in spite of being an unbeliever, you have never blasphemed in my presence. I am grateful to you for your consideration."

Maltrana rejected such praise. He would go away as soon as possible; he did not want any more favours. Would to goodness that he could leave that same day such a nest of owls! . . .

And he turned his back on Señor Vicente with insulting arrogance, assuring him that it was a great benefit to him to lose sight of the bigot and his friends.

But in the street, his haughtiness crumbled immediately. Discouragement followed his wrath. What was he going to do? Where was he to go? . . . He felt more unhappy, more helpless than he had done months before when he wandered homeless, spending his nights in some editorial rooms. Now he could not fall back upon that bed in Artistas Street. Besides, he lacked the courage one has when facing poverty alone. The thought of Feli, ill, weakened by work, unable to live as he could in the open air, facing the hazards of bohemian life and carrying in her womb a new threat for the future, crushed him.

He wandered a long time through the streets, his mind oppressed by his misfortune. As he passed by the Puerta del Sol, he noticed it was nine by the clock of a public building. For a moment, he thought of Uncle Manolo and tried to find him in his office. They could live in his house; surely he would receive them when he learned they were in the street, for he was kindhearted. But Maltrana shrunk from the idea of living by charity, deprived of that autonomy Señor Manolo was constantly

speaking about. Besides, he was married, and had children who were bound to resent the intrusion of a hungry couple.

In his optimism, he thought that luck, tired of persecuting him, was going to change for the better. The winter was close at hand ; the people who could help him out would soon be back in Madrid ; it would not be difficult to secure a commission for several articles, a lengthy translation, or a book that would bear someone else's name. The most important thing in the meantime was to wait in some corner, deep in their poverty, and not make an appearance until the opportune moment. But, where could they go without money, furniture, even without being sure of their next day's meal ? . . .

Crossing the Puerta del Sol, he saw Zarathustra's cart standing close to the curb in Carmen Street, and on top of it, his back turned to him, the rag-picking philosopher sorting the rubbish his servant had brought him.

Maltrana thought of his grandmother and her treasure. Señora Eusebia was rich ; all the neighbours swore to that. The young man became furious when he thought of the mysterious fortune of the avaricious rag-picker. He was her grandson, and suffered from hunger when he had a right to some part of the hidden treasure. . . .

A firm resolution suddenly impelled him. He would go to visit Mariposa, taking advantage of Zarathustra's absence. He believed himself capable of the greatest violence towards that sordid old woman who admired and praised him, without ever thinking of helping him with even the smallest present.

Maltrana had not passed through Cuatro Caminos for a long time. While Mosco was alive, he felt afraid to go near Carolinas, and after the poacher's death he loathed that neighbourhood, for it filled him with remorse. But necessity obliterated his scruples, and he started on his way towards the suburb of Tetuan.

Arriving at the hill on top of which Zarathustra's hut was placed, he had, as usual, to scare away the rag-picker's dogs with stones and yells.

On hearing his shouts, the grandmother came out of the kitchen and fixed her bleary eyes on the stranger.

"Grandmother, it is I . . . Isidro."

When she recognized her grandson, Mariposa wanted to embrace him, but restrained herself on noticing that her hands were dirty with her filthy cooking. Maltrana, panting with the heat, sat down in the little court in the shade of one of the huts. The grandmother showed great astonishment at his visit.

"Who would have expected you! . . . It is so long since you came to see me! Since the time you played that trick with Mosco's girl . . . ."

She stopped short, unwilling to make further reference to an event that had shaken the Carolinas district but had already been forgotten.

"Quite a few months without seeing you," continued the old woman. "And what brings you here? . . . I am sure you are looking for something."

And Mariposa winked her eyes and contracted the black wrinkly hole of her mouth, guessing that only a very important event could have brought her grandson to her dwelling.

Maltrana omitted all preambles. There was no time to waste; Zarathustra would be back very shortly, and he wanted to speak with the old woman alone.

"Grandmother, a few words," he said very gravely. "I am going to shoot myself, and I wanted to see you first and to bid you good-bye for ever."

The old woman crossed herself. Praised be the Lord! Had he gone crazy? What was the matter with him that he should talk such nonsense? . . .

With astonished eyes, she listened to her grandson, who gave her an account of his misfortunes. No money, no home; and his poor partner, ill, with the prospect of giving birth to her child in the middle of the street.

Mariposa, in utter astonishment, exclaimed:

"And I thought that you had plenty of money, Isidrin! . . . I imagined that you were earning thousands writing for the papers! . . ."

But her astonishment did not last very long. She seemed to reflect, to concentrate her thoughts, shrinking within her clothes like a timid snail retreating into its own shell.

"Ah, Lord!" she moaned. "What things happen in this world! What misfortunes! Living up here, one doesn't notice anything. . . . And what are we going to do about it, Isidrin? What can we do? . . ."

Then, guessing what her grandson seemed to tell her with his eyes, she continued, her voice broken by sobs:

"I wish I had the very treasures of the Queen of Spain to give to you. But I am poor, poorer than the rats. Polo has got it into his head that I have a little pile hidden away, and as soon as I manage to save a couple of *pesetas*, he takes them away, and if I haven't got them, he beats me. If one were not used to that sort of thing, it would be better to die."

Influenced by the common gossip that Mariposa was a rich woman, Maltrana believed the old woman was telling him a hypocritical untruth.

"Grandmother! Grandmother!" he exclaimed in entreating tones.

And to overcome her heartless avarice, he described his situation. For himself he was asking nothing. If he were alone, as in previous years, he would not come to bother her. But there was someone else—the unfortunate Feliciana, the martyr, who had been quietly living with her father, the poacher, and whom he had dragged away from her home to share his luck. He could not abandon her. Were he starving, he would take the bread from his own mouth and give it to her; he would gladly give his own blood to quench her thirst.

"You should see, grandmother, what that woman does for me. I have no work and she slaves night and day that we may get a piece of bread. If you love me, you must love her also. She is my wife and my mother at the same time. Rather than see her without shelter and food, I'll kill myself, grandmother, I'll kill myself!"

Maltrana became excited at his own words, and deeply

moved by the remembrance of what he owed to Feli, he lowered his head and bitter tears interrupted his phrases.

Seeing her grandson crying, the old woman began to cry also, rubbing her eyes with one corner of her apron.

"You are right," she sobbed. "Something must be done for her sake. That's the way a man should be. I can see that you love her dearly."

She asked her grandson how much he needed to get over his difficulties. If it were little, perhaps she could help him . . . perhaps she might find someone to lend her even five *duros*.

"I need a lot, grandmother . . . a lot. We have nothing; we need everything. No, those five *duros* are of no use to me; that's enough to eat to-day and starve to-morrow. What I ask from you is a great effort; I want you to save us, to pull us out of this hole until I may be able to fend for myself."

The old woman's eyes dried up and she made a harsh gesture, as if her emotion had suddenly disappeared. She could not save her grandson; she was poor. And she crossed her arms, determined not to be moved again by anything that Isidro might tell her.

Maltrana guessed his grandmother's thoughts. Hers was a soul hardened by avarice! And her treasure? Was she going to abandon them, feigning to be poor, when all the rag-pickers spoke of her wealth? . . .

Mariposa laughed like a mocking witch.

"My treasure! My treasure, at last! You also come for it? . . . They have deceived you, Isidrin; I have told you a thousand times. There is no such treasure; it is all lies . . . I am poor."

But the pride of her own avarice would not allow her to conceal the truth. She could not help a smile of satisfaction which betrayed the existence of the treasure and her determination to defend it against all comers.

"Grandmother!" shouted Maltrana. "Don't do it for her sake, or for mine either, if you don't love us. Do it for the sake of the little being that is coming."

He tried to soften Mariposa by talking to her about his

future child, the little darling would be like an extension of the old woman's own life. She would have a great-grandchild. Very few women managed to see their descendants to the fourth generation. And would she really be capable of abandoning the tender creature ? . . .

The family instinct awoke within the miser. She moaned again, raised her apron to her eyes, but without flinching, without granting her grandson's request.

" Unfortunate ! " she murmured. " You are very unfortunate. . . . And the one to blame for it is your mother, who wanted to leave the district. . . . It would have been far better for all concerned if she had continued in the business ! "

Maltrana became impatient. What had his mother to do with what was happening at that moment ? . . . Did she want to help him, yes or no ? . . .

The old woman continued to sob without answering, and the young man stood up with a resolute motion.

" Good-bye, grandmother. Stick to your own. I know what I ought to do."

But before he could turn his back on her, the rag-picker jumped at him.

" Isidrin . . . my son, stay. You shall have all you want ; everything grandmother has will be for you ; even if I have nothing left, even if I have to starve."

Her emotion had softened her heartless avarice ; her grandson's sadness had inspired her with fear. Besides, in her senile mind the image of her great-grandchild had become fixed ; the tender creature that was to come into the world filled her with pride.

" I will give you all, all ! " she whispered mysteriously into Maltrana's ear.

She then looked uneasily at the neighbouring hills as if afraid of the presence of some inquisitive person.

" Keep a good lookout," she added. " As soon as you see Polo's cart, let me know. Look out."

And raising one finger to her lips, to indicate discretion and vigilance, she disappeared into the narrow tunnel that led to the stable.

A long time passed. Isidro imagined the labour his grandmother was accomplishing with her shaky hands to unearth the treasure which Zarathustra suspected without ever being able to find. At last, she reappeared, dirty with cobwebs, wisps of straw covering her headkerchief. As she deposited a white cloth containing certain objects very gently on a tree stump, a metallic jingling arose.

Mariposa sighed with the pain of her sacrifice, and very slowly, looking off, as if afraid of being surprised, she undid the knots of the wrapping. A refulgence of gold, of precious stones, of shining objects that seemed more brilliant in those miserable surroundings struck Maltrana's eyes. The treasure was a reality. By heavens ! Truth is stranger than fiction. The young man thought for an instant of the wonderful books of adventure he had read in his younger days.

The old woman enjoyed her grandson's astonishment.

" How wonderful ! eh? I've spent all my life gathering this up. And don't think for a minute that I have got any of these things by foul methods ; it all comes from the rubbish. . . I have always had good customers ; all of them rich."

Maltrana stopped looking at the treasure and gazed at Mariposa with a mixture of astonishment and pity.

" Is that all, grandmother ? " he asked very quietly. " Is that all you have ? "

Mariposa regarded him, utterly shocked.

" What ! Isn't that enough ? Look here, boy, there is enough to buy the whole of Carolinas ! Look, Isidrin, it is a real treasure ! "

Maltrana did not need to examine it very closely. When the first dazzling impression had passed away, he realized that the enormous and absurd jewels that shone on top of the heap were scandalously false—theatrical properties of gilt metal studded with stones of all colours, the grandeur of which made Mariposa tremble with emotion.

" Those queenly jewels," she said, " belonged to that kind lady who cared so much for me, the actress who died. I found them among a heap of torn letters, old dresses and rags that I brought away from her house. . . . For a

moment, I thought I had better return them, but I stuck to them and I am not sorry I did. Her heirs are bad people."

The young man pushed aside those ridiculous jewels and searched with eager hands the rest of the heap.

"Look at this rosary," said the old woman. "It is made up of very fine pearls. It belonged to a court lady."

Maltrana regarded it with dismay. A fake also; nothing but ivory beads set in a little gold. And a fake also the brooches of filled gold, the rings blackened by long hiding, their stones tarnished and dead, the buttons from gorgeous uniforms, which the old woman thought were pure gold, the pins, greenish and oxidated, the stones absolutely lustreless. All those treasures, which made the rag-picker tremble with avarice, were nothing but rubbish of an insignificant value.

Isidro put aside the very things that Mariposa considered least valuable: a couple of dozen silver spoons of different shapes and sizes which had probably been mixed up with the garbage while the dishes were being washed, a little gold chain, a baby's rattle, of the same metal, and four plain rings that weighed quite a little—the only things in his grandmother's treasure which had any value at all. Perhaps they might give him as much as thirty *duros* for the whole lot.

Mariposa closely watched the selection her grandson was making, smiling when she saw that he was satisfied with the humblest part of her treasure and that he ignored the grand jewels, the brilliant articles that filled her with pride.

"You are quite right," she murmured. "The things you are taking will pull you out of the hole for the present. The rest I will keep in case you are in a tight place again, and when I die, it'll all be for you."

With religious care, she heaped on the white cloth the dazzling trifles her grandson's hands had upset, mentally praising him up to the skies. Her Isidro was a good boy; he did not want to take advantage of his grandmother's kindness; he was leaving the best things for her. Impelled by gratefulness, she undid a knot in one of the corners of the cloth and produced several silver coins.

"Here, Isidrin," she said. "Take all the money I have. Add it to those trifles you are taking, seeing that you haven't been very exacting. There must be at least seven *duros* in single and double *pesetas*."

Maltrana put the money in one of his waistcoat pockets and began to distribute the spoons and other articles among his remaining pockets.

The immense disappointment he had suffered through the candid avariciousness of the old woman changed to pitying amusement as he noticed the care with which she wrapped up the remainder of her trifles.

"Now, you have seen the treasure," she continued in a mysterious voice. "The only one who has seen it. Don't say a word about it. This can be gathered only when one has good customers and after working years and years with your eyes wide open so as not to let anything go by. When my great-grandson grows up, we will sell the diadem, the bracelets and the brooch with those diamonds like peas that fairly blind your eyes. Cheer up, Isidrin; they didn't tell you lies; your grandmother is rich. But you are the only person who should know it, for it'll all be for you."

Then she looked uneasily in the distance, placing one hand over her eyes.

"You have better eyesight, Isidrin; isn't that Polo's cart? . . . Of course it is. There comes that Jew, that crook who is always scheming how to get hold of my treasure. Run away, Isidrin; don't let him catch us here; don't let him smell the treasure."

And the old woman, restless with fear, disappeared into the tunnel, hugging the white bundle with the treasure she loved as much as her own life. She had bid Isidro good-bye hurriedly. He was to bring her great-grandchild as soon as it was born! She would be satisfied to see him once and then die, leaving him all her welath.

Planning as he walked how to get the most out of the famous treasure he carried in his pockets, Isidro descended the hill through the cornfields, so as not to meet Zarathustra.

CHAPTER X

AUTUMN was well advanced when Isidro and Feli went to live at Cambroneras. After leaving brother Vicente's house, they lived in an interior room at Embajadores Street, paying three *duros* rent. But when the first month was over, they were unable to pay for the second and had to leave the room, miraculously saving their scanty furniture.

Even more than the tortures of hunger, Maltrana feared the worries and anxieties caused by the rent. Feli thought only of securing a roof. She accomplished wonderful feats of saving in order to gather, little by little, the money for the house. She would gather a couple of *pesetas*, she had one *duro*, almost two, and suddenly an imperious want would come, an unavoidable contingency, such as having to pay the grocer—who refused to give them further credit unless he received something on account—the need of buying material for the corsets, or of having to resole Maltrana's boots while he remained a prisoner in his room. In this fashion, black luck took away all her savings at one blow.

Maltrana made a resolution. People in poor circumstances, with uncertain means, like themselves, should live only in those houses where rooms are paid for daily, in those beehives of poverty like the working-men's house where he was born.

He had lived in several buildings of that kind, in the districts of Peñuelas and Injurias, and had been disgusted by the overcrowding, sordid filthiness of the walls, by the frequent quarrels between the dishevelled females who insulted each other from door to door. . . . His poor Feli

was not a princess, but oh ! how disgusted he would feel to see her, so delicate and sweet, living in such a hell.

In Cambroneras, finding a separate room, he decided to move to that quarter, which was inhabited by gypsies—people who seemed to him more likeable and quieter than the inmates of ordinary lodging houses.

The rent was payable every evening : one and one-half *reales*. The man in charge of collections, a tall, lanky, dark fellow whose extraordinary height forced him to bend his back when he walked, called at the door early in the evening. He belonged to the police. The manager of the houses at Cambroneras employed him to collect rents and to preserve order, because his connection with the police gave him a certain standing among the tenants. For his services, he received a commission on the rents collected and a free house for himself, his prolific wife, and the flock of children who completed his family. From his younger days—spent in the country—previous to the time he became a soldier, he had preserved a fondness for gardening, and when his duties as a member of the secret police did not force him to go to Madrid, he spent hours in the heroic task of trying to convert into little gardens the waste fields of yellowish earth, irrigating them with water which he drew by hand from an abandoned well.

The young couple inspired him with such great respect that he emphatically stated that Don Isidro and Doña Feli were the only decent persons living at Cambroneras.

" Come in, Pepe," said Maltrana when a knock sounded at the door soon after nightfall.

And Pepe appeared, carrying a pencil in one hand and a book of receipts in the other. He handed over one of the sheets, after scribbling something on it, and received some copper coins.

Maltrana was fairly well satisfied with their new abode. From one of the windows he could see the river, almost at his feet, and on the other side the fields painted by Goya, and the hills on the summits of which were grouped the cypresses and mausoleums of the cemeteries of Almudena and San Isidro. Through another window, he could see the

district of Cambroneras, a wide expanse of land crossed by a brook, where the gypsy women washed their clothes. Rags and pieces of newspapers floated downstream.

Opposite the house, a big gate led into a narrow street, paved with rough stones and lined by two rows of miserable houses. Some were low-roofed ; others had a balcony at the second floor, with worm-eaten steps that creaked at the least pressure as if they were going to break down.

Maltrana was not long in getting acquainted with the heterogeneous population of Cambroneras. They formed a world by itself, an independent society within the miserable horde camping around Madrid. Pepe, the rent collector, told him the habits and eccentricities of those people, whom he called " his cattle."

Two separate divisions existed in Cambroneras, with clearly defined limits : on one side the *payos* (country folks), constituting the smaller part of the inhabitants, and on the other the gypsies, who formed by far the larger part. The *payos* were divided into beggars, who went every morning to Madrid to beg at the doors of the churches, and *quinquilleros*, who wandered from fair to fair in Castile selling knick-knacks during the summer, and in the winter organized swindling games in the suburbs, or took part in some theft whenever opportunity offered.

The gypsies were divided into three nationalities : gypsies from Andalucia, from Castile and from La Mancha. They fraternized with each other, for they belonged to the same race and had the same habits ; but each group remained loyal to its origin, believing itself superior to the others. The gypsies from Andalucia taunted those from La Mancha with their rusticity, and those from Castile with their lack of pure gypsy blood, for they had intermarried with the *payos*. The gypsies from Castile, in turn, despised those from Andalucia because of their thievery and dishonesty, which had given the whole race a shameful notoriety.

After living a few days in Cambroneras, Isidro could tell them apart at a glance. The gypsies from Andalucia were clean-shaven and wore wide hats, short wine-coloured

velvet jackets and large tufts of hair over their ears. Those from La Mancha and Castile wore fur caps and large brown cloth coats and had trimmed moustaches; their Oriental brown colour was the only thing that distinguished them from the country folk of La Mancha, whose dress they imitated.

The women went out early in the morning, not to return till late in the afternoon, or they remained in their rooms, voluntary recluses, with the impassiveness of Asiatic females. Among them, also, nationality was obvious. Those from Andalucia were fond of talking and shouting; they gesticulated freely as they talked and upset everybody with their jabbering. They wore percale skirts with long frills, and shawls passed under one arm; their hair was done into an oily knot at the back of their heads, and on each side of their foreheads they had stuck two curls; a string of blue beads coiled around their necks several times. They left shortly after sunrise on their way to Cebada Square, where they told fortunes by cards to kitchen maids—their best customers. The men idled around the doors; flocks of barefooted children, their bellies exposed, hung on to their mothers' multicoloured skirts.

"Kid," a husband would say, "let's see if you can bring something to eat to-day. I am dying with hunger."

The children ran around them, accompanying them uphill until they reached Toledo bridge. They would see if they could not steal, as on previous occasions, the *chules* (*duros*) of some country yokel. And if not *chules*, perhaps they could get some *planis*, modest *pesetas*, for the family left to the kind mercies of fate, was sadly in need.

"Mother," the little ones would shout as they stood at the end of the bridge. "Bring some *callardó*."

They meant chocolate, the great treat of the gypsies their liquor and their food. *Balinchó* (pork) was good *balebás* (bacon) was tasty; the *mantejos* (almonds) that are thrown by handfuls at weddings, were sweet; but chocolate was the best thing in the world, God's own food, that seemed to intoxicate them with its perfume and heat.

The little ones, in the hope that their mother would bring them in the evening an enormous quantity of *callardó*, would shout to her as she disappeared in the distance.

"Good-bye, mammy!"

And the gypsy woman would hurry toward Toledo gate, figuring in her perverted imagination the best way to *jonjabar* (cheat) some country yokel whom fate might send her way, and clean him out of his money, promising him, by telling his fortune, that he would surely win the first prize at the lottery.

They wandered until noon in the neighbourhood of the market, stopping the servants, bewildering them with their talk, praising their angel faces—even if they were horribly homely—lamenting with grotesque gestures of despair their unfortunate love affairs and regretting that they should not have taken the pains to be forewarned of their bad luck by consulting a gypsy.

"Your hand. . . . Show me your hand, sweetheart, for by St. John I tell you you carry your fortune in it, and you didn't know it."

They had their customers, their followers of unshakable faith who came to meet them as soon as they appeared, anxious for new revelations. They would go into some lonely close and there on the lid of the basket the gypsy would throw the greasy cards she carried under her shawl. Everything turned up: the swarthy swain who was dying for the servant, but who was ensnared by the evil cunning of a white woman whom they would have to overcome; then came the fair man, most of the time carrying a sword (which meant that he was a soldier), who would take her away on a white steed; then came money and still more money. . . .

"You must have inherited something," assured the gypsy with so firm a conviction as not to admit any contradiction.

"What could I inherit? Poor me!" answered the simple servant.

"Well then, if you haven't, you will."

And so the game would proceed. The queen: again the

bad woman who was going to cause all the trouble unless beaten by doing what the gypsy was going to tell her.

When the girl, dizzy with the gypsy's chatter, and doubting whether to spend her savings in the great remedy that was going to bring the unfaithful lover to her allegiance, finally gave her a couple of *reales*, the gypsy burst out into lamentations and pleadings.

"Queen, add another little *reale*, at least. Fancy having a face like a rose and being so stingy! Come on, beauty, you and your virgin eyes. . . . Look, I have a whole herd of *churumbeles* (children) who are only so high and are dying with hunger. My man is lame; my *bato* . . . my father! is at death's door; my poor *dai* (mother) died; my *plan* (my brother) is in Alcala gaol. . . ."

And she would go on enumerating misfortunes and deaths, as if the black pest had passed through Cambroneras.

"Come on, peach; loosen up a little on your *jurde* (money) for that won't leave you poor. I'm not asking you bank *papiris* (notes); let's have it even if it is only a few coppers more."

In their expeditions around the market, when they wandered wearily meeting no female customers, they daringly stood in front of the men who came out of the taverns, or the merchants who were getting a mouthful of fresh air at the doors of their establishments.

"Shall I tell you your fortune, pet? Give us your hand, you with the St. John beard, for you have legs like a dancer and fiery eyes."

The men chased them as if they were dogs, threatening them with the police, and they went off without resentment, making grimaces and opening their eyes wide.

"Gee, Holy Father! And what an awful temper the gentleman's got! . . . He's worse than the *Livano* (lawyer) who takes the depositions! . . . May I see you in the *estaribel* (gaol), scoundrel, and may the *Baro* (judge) refuse to let you out on bail! . . .

At about noon, the market became almost empty, and the gypsies, instead of returning to Cambroneras, went

towards the centre of Madrid, tramping the streets until late in the afternoon. They begged for alms ; they stood in front of the café windows and tapped at the panes ; they looked with uneasy eyes at the cases outside the shops, watching for an opportunity. . . . They took anything, thieving did not seem to them a great sin ; *chorar* was an occupation worthy of praise, provided it was carried out with dexterity and without risk. And when they did *chorar* a piece of cloth, some apples, or a loaf of bread, they returned home very proud of themselves, telling the neighbours :

" To-day, I gave the *jonjaro* to a farmer."

Thrusting his head through the door of one of the houses, white outside and black inside, with no ventilation except the door itself, Maltrana could tell where the inmates came from by finding out whether any women were there or not.

" You come from Andalucia, don't you ? " he purposely asked the females who sat in a circle on the hard floor, looking at each other in silence and holding their jaws in one hand.

" What ? We, from Andalucia ! " they exclaimed, feeling very much offended. " We stick to our homes. We don't go about cheating people ! "

They were gypsies from La Mancha. They had fathers or husbands who worked for the upkeep of the family, and if there were no *chambos* (sales), if trading in horses and mules was at a standstill, they kept their stomachs empty and suffered hunger silently, sitting close to the cold hearth stones, their skirts spread around them, like enormous mushrooms, ready to die without flinching.

In spite of the poverty of his own house, Maltrana was seized with pity when he saw the homes of those people ; huts with floors of tamped earth on a level lower than the street. They had no partitions, and when modesty demanded that the beds should be kept separate, they hung an old rug from a rope across the room. At the back of the hut—their heads stuck into boxes that served as mangers, their haunches, facing the door—were the horses, mules, and donkeys which constituted the wealth of the

family. The tattered mattresses, piled up in a corner, were spread at night close to the hind legs of the animals, and the family slept with their property, comforted by the heat from the dung. A few bricks in the centre of the hut served as a hearth. No fire was lit except at night. The smoke from the wood filled the hut, issuing as best it could through the open door, or the cracks in the roof, for there was not the least opening that might have served as a chimney. The walls were blackened by a coating of soot, which represented several years of asphyxiating atmosphere ; the animals, used to the slow suffocation, merely snorted in their mangers. The women, their eyes full of tears, owing to the smoke, watched the frying pan ; the babies coughed, pushing themselves against the maternal breasts, as if seeking the refreshing milk.

Pepe, the rent collector, extolled the advantages of living in continual smoke.

" Thanks to it," he said, " they don't die like bed-bugs. The smoke cleans them, for they never touch water. My goodness, Don Isidro, how terribly filthy they are ! . . . On the other hand, I have never seen people so clean about their food."

They would not accept food from anyone, or use up remains from other people's tables. The gypsies brought food from the shops when they returned from Madrid—raw material which they cooked in the presence of the family. They spent whole days without eating, and retained the impassiveness acquired through habit. In spite of their hunger they spoke with disgust of the rag-pickers, beggars and countryfolks whom poverty brought into contact with them—persons of vile stomachs who fed on the refuse thrown away by others, and who dressed themselves in rags.

Chorar . . . yes, all they could ! They stole in Madrid, they stole in the fields during the summer time when they went from fair to fair, but all they stole was new, never having been used. Their clothes, though patched and dirty, were their own ; they had been made for their own bodies, and for all their rags, they preferred them to better

clothes that had previously been worn. Their stomachs preferred hunger to nausea. When an old dress fell into their hands, they sold it with a lordly air to the rag-pickers. In nights of plenty, the family sat around the frying pan. The mother would throw fresh pieces of meat into the sizzling oil and each one would fish out a piece with his jack-knife. No matter how fast the mother threw the pieces in, the frying pan was never full.

On Thursday, the men gathered at the horse market near the Toledo gate. Even those who had no animals went, in the hope that they might manage to get something —wielding a whip, as if conducting an imaginary drove. As soon as they met a farmer, they would give him *emburreo* and *correate,* or in other words, cheat him.

They returned home lamenting the bad condition of the market. They would have to wait for the fairs in the summer time. There were hardly any buyers in the Madrid market ; all of them were gypsies . . . and how could they cheat each other ? . . .

Those who were better off drove their animals back through the narrow doors into their huts ; the humble *gueñis,* of long ears and scandalous braying ; the *gras* (horse), of curly mane and combed tail, which they forced to gallop around their master whip, insisting at the same time that the king himself did not ride a better one ; the *choro* and the *chori,* male and female mules respectively, which they hoped to sell at a good price when they started on their summer expedition through Castile and La Mancha, offering their beasts to the farmers.

The rest of the week, the gypsies remained at Cambroneras doing nothing, waiting for the women to come home—lively and noisy birds that brought the bread for the family in their bills. They breakfasted on a glass of *aguardiente* (raw spirits), or a chunk of bread, and endured their hunger in placid idleness. They played at ninepins, and at a game of throwing an iron bar in an open space of Cambroneras ; those who had any ability played the guitar, thus alleviating their suffering with some melancholy music ; the industrious ones lay for hours and hours on

their stomachs, by the river side, waiting for some sparrow kindly to step into the net they had placed on the grass. Some old men, with magisterial airs, clapped their hands in front of a group of chocolate-coloured little devils with little tufts of hair over their ears, who were learning to dance, moving their feet and arms in a grotesque fashion, and shaking their bellies with savage contortions. Theirs was the tribal life : the males doing nothing, because of their superior strength, calmly waiting for the food which the females would bring them from the wood, that is to say, the neighbouring town.

After a few days in Cambroneras, Maltrana knew the names of all the respectable crooks of the gypsy tribe, agile and sun-tanned men with faces pitted by small-pox. They had such nicknames as *Mono Bastian, Matamoros, Malafolla, Cachuli, Mochon, Navaco,* and others no less queer. Since their favourite drink was chocolate, they never got drunk.

The only one who, with incoherent speeches and great yells, showed any liking for alcohol, was Salguero, who had nicknamed himself *Salguerillo*—a rascally old man who had lived in the first house of the narrow street for the last thirty years. In winter he made wicker baskets, helped by an old woman who lived with him ; in summer he went to the fairs to practise his trade as a shearer.

Late in the afternoon, the women returned home, tired from running around Madrid all day long. The empty stomachs trembled at the approach of those messengers of plenty. The gypsies recognized them as soon as they reached the hill of Cambroneras.

" There come *Buchichi* and *Pique,*" said some of the men who were playing ninepins, notifying the husbands.

And after them came *Clavellina, Cortezuela, Pote, Pelela* and *Chirrinas.* These were the prettiest of the lot and were famous for their ability to bring home an excellent booty. A simpleton who fell into their hands was parted from his belongings in a second. The only one who could compare with them was *Culo de corcho,* an obese gypsy woman with small eyes, and very light with her hands,

who, in the winking of an eye, hid under her skirts anything that she could *chorar*.

The men went forth to meet them. The gate of the street where the gypsies lived poured out group after group of dirty children who had spent the day singing in chorus, snapping the *castañuelas*, and taking dancing lessons to allay their hunger.

"What are you bringing?" the gypsy would ask of his wife, stretching his limbs, numbed by the long rest, pulling up his trousers with both hands and stroking the locks that fell over his ears.

If the expedition had proved profitable, the woman strutted very proudly up to the man.

"Get out of the way, ninny. It is some *callardó* (chocolate) you and the *churumbeles* (children) are going to lick. . . ."

They lighted a fire in their hut, preparing the chocolate first, leaving the stew for the supper later on. In other homes, they did altogether without the frying pan, as after a day of hunger they did not wish to have any food other than *callardó*. It was the luxury of their race, the food of the privileged, and the whole family, sitting down on their haunches, esctatically admired the pot full of boiling chocolate. If the woman had managed to collect one *duro* with her swindling and thieving, she spent almost the whole of it for tablets of the precious paste. The family sipped the liquid chocolate with delectation and chewed it raw, as if it were bread. The bitter perfume spread to the neighbouring houses, exciting the envy of the other gypsies. The children peeked at the door with greedy eyes, then went to give their mothers an account of the kingly banquet.

"My *dai* (mother): they are having *callardó* at *Mochuelo's*. They say they have made a good *chambo* (sale)."

And the mother sighed with envy. What luck some people have!

From other houses came desperate cries, noise of strife and blows against the walls. A door opened and a head was thrust out with a horrified grimace.

"Help! Help! . . . My Henry is killing me. . . . He's breaking my back. He's tearing me to pieces because I didn't bring home anything."

She continued to yell, her head sticking out of the door, her body inside, without moving, so that her man could wallop her at his ease. Nobody paid any attention to the cries: it was an everyday affair. The woman who wandered through Madrid and brought nothing home was sure of getting a hiding. It was something demanded by good habits, a venerable tradition; all had seen the same thing done in their parents' home.

At nightfall, Pepe, the rent collector, went from hovel to hovel with his book of receipts. In some houses, he found the man sitting in a corner, with an ugly face, and the woman lying on the floor.

"Pass on to the next, Josellilo," moaned the gypsy. "I can't give you your *reale* to-day; I haven't earned a thing. See how this blackguard has left my body."

And she pointed to her husband, who remained impassive with the serenity of a man who has done his duty.

The fire was out, and the flock of children, fully convinced that they could not get a chunk of bread at home, continued to snap their *castañuelas*, going back and forth in front of the doors that smelled of chocolate, in the hope that someone might give them a few pieces of bread dipped in it.

In other places, the rent collector noticed that the family hurriedly hid their opulence when he appeared. The hearth had only a few embers; the pots, dirty with chocolate, had been put away inside the roll of mattresses. The oldest female in the family handed him a few coins, sighing with discouragement.

"Here you are, Joselillo, one *plañi* (peseta)," she said. "We haven't got any more; I owe you two *reales*, which I will give you to-morrow. Oh! We are dying with hunger. . . ."

And Joselillo went to another house, feeling sure of his money, for although those people lagged behind in the payments, they always squared up their accounts. They

were rovers who, as soon as the summer came, wandered from fair to fair, and for this very reason wanted to make sure of a roof when the cold weather should come.

When Isidro left his house in the morning, he spoke to Salguero, the shearer. The latter came to meet him saluting him with great ceremony.

"May the Lord accompany your worship, most excellent sir. You know that *Salguerillo* is your faithful servant, even though he is a poor *cañi* (fellow)."

When Isidro was able to give him a cigarette, Salguero, satisfied with the present, accompanied him down-hill to the promenade of Ocho Hilos, constantly jabbering in his incoherent gypsy language.

The weather was his constant worry. If it did not rain, things were in bad shape.

"But, what does it matter to you whether it rains or not?" asked Maltrana laughingly. "Where are your fields, that you should worry about it? . . ."

Salguero was astonished at the question. Rain meant bread to them. It made good crops, and when the fields were fertile, the farmers spent their money more liberally buying horses.

"We live from the summer, Don Isidro. If it weren't for the fairs, we should die like rats. I shear, and my friends who have animals, sell them. In winter, fodder is very dear. Those poor people you see there, starve themselves many a time, so that their animals, which are their fortune, will not lack fodder. . . . In summer, if the crop is good, the farmer is generous and doesn't mind if he gives us hay and oats as we go by."

Salguero spoke enthusiastically of the summer fairs, great horse marts that enabled the gypsies to earn enough to keep themselves the rest of the year. He knew them all; he went to them riding on a donkey, his shears thrust across his sash. Nobody was left in Cambroneras except his old woman and a few widows. Even the women with the largest families started on the trail behind the herd, followed by their numerous children. While they transacted their crooked business at the fair, the women went

from house to house throwing cards and telling fortunes ; the oldest offered to cure illnesses by mysterious remedies which had been handed down from mother to daughter since the remotest antiquity.

The first two fairs were on St. John's day, at Segovia and Avila. Then came the famous one at Alcala in the month of August. In September those of Illescas, Aranjuez, Ocaña, Mora, Quintanar, and Belmonte took place. The last came in October, at Consuegra, Talavera, and Torija. A short time before Maltrana settled in Cambroneras, all his neighbours had returned from these last fairs, and the good days of trading were over.

Salguero became very enthusiastic recalling the great gatherings of animals that needed to be shorn ; the meetings of gypsy families who came from the farthest corners of the Peninsula. Although all united by family ties after long centuries of marriages within their own race, they saw each other only once a year, when they met at the fairs. Afterwards, they returned by their several roads to their winter quarters.

Maltrana became acquainted, through the shearer, with the interesting geography of the gypsies. Toledo was *Toledate,* and Cordova *Cordobate.* A city was a *Gao.* Valladolid was called *Gao baro,* " the big town " ; Seville, *Gao de silla ;* Valencia, *Gao de los marrulles,* and the whole of Galicia, *Gao de los malalos.* Madrid was *Los Foros.*

" They are Paradise, those fairs, Don Isidro. There is a *chambo* (deal) every minute, and a beast is sold ; it isn't like here, where many Thursdays pass without even a miserable she-ass changing hands at Toledo gate. And when I am not shearing at the fairs, I help to fix the animals, and, as I have the gift of the gab, I do my little bit so that a friend may sell his animal, and then there is a treat, and we drink a tumbler of *mor* and a glass of *pañalo.* Your honour probably doesn't know what those things are. How could you when, even after reading so many books, you don't understand gypsy lingo ! . . . Well, they mean wine and spirits ; and if you ever hear my friends say that I

am *molalo*, it means that they think I am drunk. But I am not ; just a little happy, and no more."

The presence of Maltrana and Feli in a quarter where the only strangers were beggars and the hawkers of the fairs caused a certain stir among the gypsies. The couple lived away from the main street, in the upper storey of an isolated house the lower part of which was occupied by a grocer's shop.

At first Feli had felt some repugnance towards her new home. It frightened her to see so many gypsies around. Those bronze-coloured, evil-looking men, like highway robbers, made her uneasy. She was afraid of the women, whom she saw at a distance shouting and threatening each other, in a queer language of which she could understand but a few words. They lived peacefully, but she felt the uneasiness of a European woman who finds herself among an African population, seemingly subdued, but who may suddenly feel race hatred.

Isidro laughed at her worries. Where could they be better off than there ? It was true that the river smelled very badly, but they would gradually get used to the stench from the refuse of the city. On the other hand, they could hear the birds, they could admire the fields and the sky, and when they opened their window, they did not find a dirty wall a few feet away, shutting off the air and obliterating the blue sky.

Isidro, thanks to his imagination, beautified the district. A century ago, it was the most charming part of Madrid. Did Feli see the fields on the other side of the river ? Well, there the *chisperos* and *manolas* (low people of Madrid, male and female) whom Goya has painted, used to dance ; that was where the great artist, and the beautiful little duchesses who had themselves portrayed naked, used to wander about. Those little copses had witnessed the most lovable and pastoral period of our history.

" Think of it, Feli," added the young man. " For one and one-half *reales* per day, we live like lords right in the country, and besides, we pay the rent daily, which is a great advantage."

The constant sight of those people of terrifying aspect and peaceful habits, overcame Feli's fear of them. The women, on their part, after seeing her so often at the window, working on the corsets, felt a good deal of admiration for her. Her industry inspired great respect in those wandering females whose domestic tasks consisted of lighting the fire and allowing the family to eat their meals half cooked.

Besides, vague rumours had reached the gypsy folks that Isidro was a writer and that although he was in sore straits, he was likely to mend his fortune. This was enough to make them feel as much respect for him as for the judge, the lawyers, and the other grave gentlemen who also write, and who can send a man to gaol as soon as a horse or mule is missing. Some old women, wearing the black skirts of widows, stopped Maltrana to speak to him about their sons who were in Melilla or Ceuta.

"It was all through nothing, sir," they sobbed. "He just lost his temper. He carried his *churi* (knife) in his sash, and when he was insulted . . . he used it. Your honour must have lots of influential friends. . . . See if you can get him a pardon, or if you can improve his condition in gaol."

Those people of fiery imagination, who lived by continual lying, had created a flattering legend about the young lady, so kind, so industrious, who remained for hours and hours at the window with her eyes lowered, as if she were a virgin at her altar. The groups of little gypsy girls who ran along the streets of the quarter, snapping the *castañuelas*, stopped at the foot of the window and sang to the *Señorita*, as they called her. Feli could see the group of unkempt little heads with fiery eyes and copper-coloured skin ; the mouths, open as they sang, showing their dark-rose palates, and their sharp teeth, spotlessly clean. The young woman saluted them with a sweet smile, and they all burst forth into uproarious shouts.

"Give us something, *Señorita*. . . . Throw us even a kiss, sweetheart."

And they spoke among themselves of what they had

heard from their mothers. The *Señorita* was the daughter of some very rich nobleman, a marquis or something, but, as he would not let her marry Isidro, she had fled with him, and the two suffered hunger, and she worked for her man, as all honest women do ; just as if she had been a good gypsy.

Her industry to support her man, and the legends that passed from mouth to mouth about her noble birth, attracted the irresistible curiosity of the women of Cambroneras.

The first to visit at the house was Teodora, the old woman who enjoyed the greatest prestige in the quarter ; a marvel of knowledge, respected even by the men. A widow, she was dressed in mourning with true gypsy exaggeration, for above her shawl, the edge of her black percale chemise showed.

Although no fortune other than three animals belonging to a son of hers was visible, she was the richest woman in Cambroneras and her house was the best. She had several stools in it, and the sooty walls were decked with lace paper, such as is used to decorate pantry shelves, forming multi-coloured tapestries which gave her hut an Oriental flavour, harmonizing with the swarthy faces of the inhabitants.

Teodora was the wisest woman of her race. She was physician to the men, midwife to the women, and *catañeadora* to the girls who were getting married. There was no gypsy virgin who did not pass through her hands, so that she could certify to her condition. The farmers of the district sarcastically called her " the mother of the virgins."

She went to Isidro's house with the pretext of Feli's interesting condition. She knew more about those things than all the doctors put together ; and after a careful examination, half-closing her eyes and sticking her wrinkled lips out like a trumpet, she said with assurance :

" It's going to be a girl, sweeter and prettier even than her own mother. I can see her from here."

Flattered by her extravagant praises, and interested in

her extraordinary stories of gypsy customs, Feli was very pleased to greet her in the afternoons. Sometimes other women accompanied her, and she made a great show of her friendship with the *Señorita*.

Feli paid particular attention to Teodora's daughter, fourteen years old, clumsily dressed in mourning, and with an air of resigned sadness, as if she had been a nun who was forced to live in the world.

" She is a widow, *Señorita*," said the old woman. " Her husband died after they had been living together two years. . . . She will never be able to marry again ; our law forbids it. A woman should never have but one husband. The men may marry as soon as the period of mourning is over ; that's because they are men. But the women can't. Look at the poor girl. So young, and she spends her life thinking about her dead husband. No more festivals for her, no more weddings, no more receptions. When her husband died, she had her hair cut off with a knife, not with scissors, but with a knife, for that's what the law orders ; she threw a cloak over her head, and she began to cry. She sleeps between black sheets, she wears coarse shoes and dresses of rough cloth, and whenever there is a party in our house, she runs to that of a neighbour, fleeing from the noise. Ah, *Meriven !* What a bad beast ! What sadness she carries with her ! . . ."

And as she named Death, the terrible *Meriven*, she made grotesque grimaces of horror, as if Death were really in front of her and wanted to seize her.

Feli also noticed a very young woman who wore red combs in her hair, wide flowing skirts decorated with flower designs, and series of strings of green, blue and pink beads around her neck. She was just a girl ; puberty had not yet swollen her bosom with the feminine buds ; her wide dress, rustling scandalously as she walked, betrayed the thinness of a tadpole.

" And that girl there," asked Feli, " when is she getting married ? "

" That's a good one ! " laughed the old woman lewdly.

"You might not think it, to look at her, but she's married to my son Rafael, the one they call *Boto*. She is thirteen, but I was younger still when I married my late husband . . . I was eleven."

And Teodora told Feli all the incidents of a marriage, the most important event in gypsy life. The young men of twenty usually chose a girl of twelve or thirteen. Women, after that age, are of no value whatever. The lover seeks the coöperation of some female whose years make her respectable. In Cambroneras, Teodora was always the choice. "Seña Teodora: I love So-and-so, and with good intentions." The old woman, proud that they should put their trust in her, goes to see the girl. "So-and-so wants to be your *buño*, but seriously, to marry you right away." And the gypsy virgin lowers her head and gives her answer. "If he loves me and does not want to betray me and ruin me, and seeing that such a respectable woman as yourself speaks for him . . . all right, I'll be his *buñi*." They meet without their parents' knowledge, far away from the quarter. They spend hours and hours alone, in absolute freedom, but there is no danger that a good gypsy man would go beyond certain limits.

When the *buño* feels he is in a position to keep up a home, and has a friend who will be his best man and defray the expense of the wedding, he kidnaps the *buñi*, taking her to his parents' house. Thereupon, there is a tremendous racket in the quarter. The *bato* (father) of the bride rushes out into the street shouting that he is going to kill his daughter. All his friends, relatives and neighbours hold him, so that he may not carry out his paternal vengeance. He curses, shows the whites of his eyes, and asks for a two-barrelled *pusca* (gun), well loaded with lead, to kill the elopers, or a sharp *churi* (knive) to cut their throats, and he remains in the same spot, in spite of the fact that his friends scarcely hold him, limiting themselves to giving him prudent advice, as is their habit.

"What are you going to do, pal? Those things are bound to happen in life. . . . We did the same thing when we were young."

The father finally returns home, and as he is bound to vent his wrath on somebody, custom demands that he shall give his wife a terrific thrashing.

Two days after, the young gypsy appears before the girl's father dressed in the red velvet jacket and wide white hat he wears on holidays. He kneels very contritely before the old man, seizes one of his hands, kisses it, and then sobs :

" Your honour is the knife, and I, ah, me ! am the flesh. Let your worship cut wherever he pleases."

These words, which have been repeated for centuries, move the old gypsy and bring tears to his eyes, as if he heard them for the first time. He raises the boy, throws his arms around his neck and says with deep emotion :

" I forgive you because I love you ; because you are not to blame. . . . But don't let her come, because if she does, I'll kill her."

A few days afterwards the girl appears, escorted by Teodora and several other respectable witches of Cambroneras.

" Here's your girl ! " they shout from the door. " Let's see if you dare to thrash her, you brute ! "

The gypsy turns, raises his arms as if he were going to smite the girl, who lies at his feet with hands clasped and sorrowful face, and suddenly bursts into tears.

" My daughter ! . . . *grañi* of my heart ! What sorrow you have caused us ! "

He embraces her, giving her noisy kisses, and his poor wife cries, but for joy to see that for the present, there are to be no more thrashings.

The girl returns to her sweetheart's home and remains there until the day of the wedding, which does not take place for six, eight or ten months, while the parents gather enough money for the costly ceremony.

Feli was curious to see a wedding between gypsies. She had heard marvellous things about it.

" We take up a big earthenware jar, throw it up in the air, it breaks, and they are married," laughingly said one of Teodora's friends.

"Shut up, scoundrel!" exclaimed the old woman. "Don't fool the *Señorita!* That jar business is all *jonjaba* (nonsense) which we tell to the country people; lies which they swallow, just as the cursed fools believe that we steal *churumbeles* (children) to take the fat away from them. There is no jar, nor anything like it. Some get married according to Rome. . . . This one, for instance."

And she pointed to her daughter-in-law, maliciously laughing as she remembered the great presents of her wedding. Some ladies, who came to explain the catechism in a neighbouring church, had taken a great liking to the neat, pretty girl, and had insisted that she should get married according to the Catholic ritual.

The old woman spoke to them, mentioning that they were very poor. The gypsies are good believers and are not afraid of entering a *Cangrí*, that is to say, a church. But the *erajais* (priests) make you pay such a lot for their work! The pious ladies, charmed by Teodora's talk, undertook to defray all the expenses. They gave the bridegroom a complete suit of clothes, with a cloak of rich cloth, and they made the bride look as handsome as a Virgin. Besides, they gave them one hundred *duros*, and bought sweets by the bushel so that everybody in Cambroneras would have enough.

"What a wedding, *Señorita!* The money those saints spent on it! . . . The *Cangrí* was full of lights; they placed a gilt cloth over my kid's head, and a very talkative *erajai* began to shout, as if he had never seen any gypsies getting married according to Rome; as if we were some Indians who did not believe in God. . . . Then, they poured sweets into Cambroneras as if it were rain from the sky; the *manrelaos* (sweets) fell down like hail. . . . And when the ladies *najaron* (went away) and we were left alone, we married the kids according to our custom, according to gypsy law."

Teodora, before speaking of that law and of its practice, cautiously looked around. They were all married or widows there; no young woman was present; she could speak freely.

The principal figure at the weddings was herself, Señora Teodora, alias *Catañeta*, whose business it was to *catañear* the bride. One day before the ceremony, she went to Madrid accompanied by the oldest women of the quarter carrying large baskets for the sweets. They bought them by the bushel, especially the *mantajos*, the sugar-coated almonds, which constituted the principal delicacy for the gypsies. Besides, they had to purchase a crown of flowers for the bride, the satin band she was to wear across her bosom, and the kerchief, the famous kerchief, which was the principal article in the wedding.

"Buy it of the very best," said the best man, who was the one who footed the bill. "Never mind the expense; get it of the finest Philippine fibre. I leave it to Teodora; she knows about these things."

On the following day the bride appeared radiant with beauty, in petticoats and underwaist, with the band of red satin across her bosom, her hair hanging loose and a crown of cloth flowers as tall as a helmet around her head. The guests remained at the door of the house and Teodora, grave and frowning like a priestess, advanced with the rich kerchief in her hand. With her entered the parents of bride and groom and the oldest members of both families, and as soon as the door was closed, the bride stretched herself on a couch still wearing her band and her crown.

When Teodora had completed the mystic rites, the door was opened again and the old woman showed the kerchief. The people rushed in, shouting for joy, greeting the bride with noisy exclamations:

"Hurrah for the beauty! . . . Hurray for virtue! Hurrah for honour! Let's get them together!"

The best man seized a basket full of sugar-coated almonds and emptied its contents over the bride. The latter, lying on the couch, stood the shower without wincing. The parents then greeted her with a similar shower of almonds and after them came the most important elderly people and all the guests, even the most insignificant boys. The bride disappeared under the hail of sugar; one could see only her head with the flowery helmet struggling to free

herself from the hail, while the rest of her body remained paralysed by the avalanche of almonds.

"Let's get them together!" the people shouted. "Music! Music!"

The guitars broke into a melancholy twang, the groom gave his hand to the bride to help her up from the almonds, which were crushed under foot, and after the bride had placed her crown on the groom's head, they began to dance. They spent the night in that fashion, eating sweets and throwing them against the walls, and drinking cups of chocolate by the dozen until dawn, when surfeited with sweets and chocolate, everybody went to bed. On the following day, the mothers of the newly-weds made dishes with the almonds which had been scattered over the nuptial bed, and sent them to marriageable girls with a flower from the crown. The groom rode a horse, carrying the bride on the crupper; all the young men, riding their best animals, escorted them, carrying the girls of the quarter on the cruppers, and the showy cavalcade started at a trot for the fields, as if this ceremony were an initiation of the married couple into the wandering existence of their race.

"And several days pass, after that," continued Teodora, "before the couple get together really. While they live with their parents, they feel ashamed and sleep separately. Only when they go to their own house do they dare to sleep together."

Feli was astonished as she listened to the account of those primitive customs which were still being practised at the very doors of a great city.

When Isidro came home, she repeated these stories to him, and the young man, as he listened to her, wonderingly looked at the neighbouring bridge, where carriages, carts, and pedestrians, the whole stream of traffic of a large city, were passing. He also looked at the neighbouring streets, with their gas lamps and at the electric trams which were coming down the [illegible]e of Ocho Hilos, throwing off green and blue sp[illegible] their wheels. Only a few feet separated the moc[illegible]nat throbbed above the valley

from the traditions of a nomadic existence, from the barbarism of a wandering race, insensible to all progress. The two existences came into daily contact with each other, but they were not aware, did not know each other, and the people of the valley, isolated as they were, did not feel the slightest influence from the people above.

Sometimes, when Maltrana returned home before nightfall he found the women talking together. When the old woman saw him, she greeted him with great ceremony, as if she had been the mistress of the house.

"Come in, Holy Father. . . . Come in, your lordship. . . . What an honour for us to see you! We were here keeping company to this April rosebud."

She spoke of the coming baby as if she saw it, going over its features in detail, mentioning those in which it would resemble its mother, and those in which it would look like its father.

Maltrana listened with ill-disguised impatience to the old woman's chatter. The difficulties of his life, always increasing, irritated his temper so that he could not bear the jabbering of the witch.

Late in the afternoon, Teodora looked at her daughter-in-law, signing to her to look out of the window.

"*Sicobelate a la parlacha* and see if your husband is around."

The gypsy was waiting for his mother and his wife, longing for his supper, but not daring to go up to Isidro's house, and as soon as he caught sight of his wife he yelled in a gruff voice:

"*Chalate al quer* (let's go home)!"

The women went away, but when Maltrana found himself alone with Feli, his sadness increased, as if he could see more clearly his frightful situation.

The time so anxiously awaited by him had come. It was beginning to get cold; those who could give him work, their holidays over, were returning to Madrid; nevertheless, his situation was not improving.

As soon as he heard that the Marquis of Jimenez had arrived, he hastened to pay him a visit and try to induce

him to write another book. He met with a disastrous reception.

"I am very angry at you!" exclaimed the marquis, puckering his brow. "Indeed, and I will not collaborate with you any more! Youth is indiscreet."

And he went on complaining, as if he had been injured through his excessive confidence in an inferior being.

Throughout the summer he had been a target for the laughter of his friends. How they had joked about him at the receptions of the leader of his party! . . . They were telling everybody that the book was not his; that it had been written for him by a young man for a few *pesetas*, and that the young man had been making fun of him by quoting fantastical authors and copying paragraphs from books that did not exist.

"To the latter accusations, I pay no attention," said the marquis with the magnanimity of a just man. "We must give every man his due. The book is perfectly all right; what is said in it is absolutely true; I ought to know. And all that about false authors and books that do not exist, is nothing but envy, envy and nothing else. . . . That is not what annoys me; what I resent is that they should say that the book is not mine, that they should try to make me cut a sorry figure with the leader, who, as you know, honoured me with a preface. . . . And for this you are to blame, for you have not been sufficiently discreet, you have spoken with the lack of reserve due to your young years, and you have placed me in a ridiculous position, yes, sir, in a ridiculous position that is bound to cause considerable harm to my political career."

Maltrana, dumbfounded by the marquis's wrath, attempted to defend himself. He had never spoken about the authorship of the book; that was perfectly true. Perhaps his enemies had discovered that he went to the press to correct the proofs; perhaps the indiscretions originated elsewhere . . . but he could swear to it; he had not said a word about it.

As to the faithfulness of the quotations, his conscience did not allow him to concern himself with the same energy.

He stammered as he made his excuses. Perhaps he had made a mistake in the name of an author ; perhaps he had attributed to one what another had said. . . . But the marquis energetically interrupted him :

" No ; I repeat that the book is perfectly all right. I ought to know ! There is nothing to be said about that. . . . What annoys me is that they should say that the book is not mine ; that they should suppose that a man of my standing would deck himself with borrowed feathers."

He said this in a bitter tone, with the expression that struck terror into the government when he attacked them for their lack of protection to the corn, and finally Maltrana also grew indignant against the evil tongues who supposed that the Marquis of Jimenez was incapable of writing a book.

Isidro left the great man without receiving either money or a commission. Besides, he felt certain that the marquis was closing his door to him forever. After such gossip, the best way to show that Maltrana had not given him any help, was to do without him absolutely. He made the young man understand this perfectly well by the cold manner, the soft hand and the advice with which he dismissed him.

" Be more discreet, young man. In order to make good, it is essential to be prudent. Life is no joke ; you must not be a dreamer, young friend."

Maltrana returned to his hovel at Cambroneras in despair.

He went to Madrid every day pursuing a hope, which fluttered before him tantalizingly. He visited his friends in the editorial rooms, eagerly inquiring when he would be able to get a job ; he offered his services to the managers to put on wrappers and bundle up parcels. He would take anything ; the main object was to be able to earn a couple of *pesetas* per day, no matter how. He even sought letters of introduction to some city councillors, asking them for a job in some of the city departments.

He had few parcels of corsets to carry to the factory near the Puerta del Sol. For two weeks Feli had had the same dozen and was not able to finish it.

She was ill, very ill. Maltrana anxiously watched the development of her illness. She complained of fearful headaches, she became blind at times, she spoke incoherently, insulting Isidro occasionally without any reason, and, again, throwing her arms around his neck, asked his forgiveness with a flood of tears.

The winter threatened to be frightfully cold. Every morning the pools in the river were covered with sheets of ice. The gypsies remained in their huts, getting smoked at their hearths. In the house of the two lovers there was neither bread nor fire. Feli was dressed in her summer clothes, with no protection against the cold other than a shawl purchased in a pawnshop. Isidro still had that overcoat of an indefinable colour—the livery of his poverty. It served to hide his thin suit and his threadbare shirt, which was not entirely concealed by a black muffler, shining with grease, which he wore around his neck. The poor young man presented an even more deplorable aspect than when he lived in Artistas Street with only his stepfather. Feli, who in former days had looked after him so well, now remained motionless in the only whole chair in the house, paying no attention to what went on around her, insensitive except to the intense cold that made her shiver in her light dress.

Maltrana sallied forth daily in search of bread. He went to Madrid to look, in vain, for a position, to " touch " people, and to beg from everybody he knew. No longer was he the wolf that comes down from the mountain in search of prey ; he was the poor timid insignificant rodent that slowly climbs from its burrow to the heights of the great city, waiting for a crumb to fall from the banquet table of the mighty.

Feli stayed at home, ill, shivering with cold, her eyes fixed on the floor with stupid vagueness. Isidro started on his way weakened by hunger, having breakfasted on a warmed-up cup of coffee, or a glass of *aguardiente*. The rain soaked his [illegible] shoes, frigid hurricanes, that made the sleeves [illegible] flutter like the wings of some funereal bird, whipped him.

One morning, as he opened the door, a pile of snow fell at his feet. Everything was white as far as his eyes could see, with the lustrous and funereal whiteness of a dead virgin's shroud; the bridge and the river were white; the hill of Cambroneras, the roofs of the quarter, and the arid fields, all were white. Silence was complete; the place was absolutely deserted. Under the weight of the snow, the world seemed to have died during the night. The feeble blue smoke that escaped through the chimneys was the only sign of life.

Dumbfounded, Maltrana hesitated for a moment. He felt a sudden longing for his four walls, the love of home that makes men shut themselves up within their houses. But in his own home upstairs nothing was left. The previous night he had devoured half a loaf of bread and the rind of a piece of cheese. Feli ate nothing; her condition, and the dislike she felt for coarse food, had long since driven away her appetite. They had to live. . . . Forward!

He started on his way, his ill-clad legs sinking in the snow. Scarcely protected by his summer trousers, threadbare at the ends, that barely covered the tears and imperfections of his boots, his feet became cold at contact with the snow, and after a few steps, he thought he was walking barefooted.

When he reached Madrid, the streets were deserted—no carriages, no cars to be seen; roads and pavements levelled down by the white sheet, as if it had rained salt. On both sides of the streets there were black muddy paths through which the few pedestrians who had ventured abroad walked between two walls of snow. The trees seemed to be of cotton; white flakes hung from balconies and eaves. The street lamps displayed a white covering set awry like a night cap. The ragamuffins, overjoyed at the novelty of the scene, rolled up big snowballs, which they fashioned into grotesque figures of their own devising.

Maltrana wandered through Madrid, shivering with cold, his feet frozen. He went up to see an old friend to ask him

for money, even if it were only one *peseta*, but he was out. He went to the other end of the town in search of another friend, but he was not at home either.

As a last resource, he thought of the Marquis of Jimenez. He could not abandon Maltrana ; he would beg him for help, even if he had to go down on his bended knees.

Trailing his feet along, he reached the Salamanca district. He had to argue with the butler, who would not let him pass, but finally allowed him to go up the service stairway, so that the main entrance would not be soiled with the melting snow dripping from his feet. At the kitchen door, they unceremoniously sent him away after a servant had disappeared for a few minutes to announce his arrival. The marquis was very busy ; he could not see Maltrana.

It was noon. The sky, of a whitish grey, threatened more snow. The light, like an interminable twilight, was reflected by the snow with livid tones. Maltrana, a prey to discouragement, walked along, his arms hanging by his sides, not knowing where to go.

His strength was crumbling ; unable to keep up the fight, he wished to die. All roads were barred to him ; he walked along and it was as if the world had been depopulated. All the snow his eyes could see had lodged itself within his soul.

At the Puerta del Sol, he came upon an enormous brazier full of burning coal, around which a host of ragamuffins and vagabonds were warming their hands, stamping at the same time to thaw their frozen feet.

Maltrana joined them, and the beneficent influence of heat seemed to awaken his will. What was he doing there? Remorsefully he thought of Feliciana, who was probably shivering with cold in their miserable house, while he was warming himself at the public brazier. Those vagabonds, without family or affections, were superior to him ; they could fight against misfortune more bravely than he.

He thought of the possibility of softening the grocer at Cambroneras, to whom he already owed so much. His salvation, for the moment, was there, since everybody in Madrid was out of sight, as if the cold hardened consciences,

as if the paralysation of nature isolated men in their egotistic comfort.

He returned home. As he passed through Toledo gate, he saw the immaculate sheet of snow without an imprint, free of the muddy tramping of the streets, level and brilliant, like an immense shroud that enveloped the river, the hills and the houses, but left the trees sticking out like broken threads.

He felt afraid of the flat expanse which hid the inequalities of the ground, the gutters, the hollows of the trees, the slopes of the excavations. The image of his future life in that white, silent, monotonous plain appeared in gloomy hallucination before his mind, weakened by hunger.

The world was cold, soulless, ruthless ; it watched his painful struggle, sensing no charitable impulse.

To die of hunger ! . . . As far as he was concerned, he was ready at any moment ; he would finally rest. But, what about the unfortunate woman who was waiting for him, ill, almost crazy, as if she could not bear the weight of her body ? What would her fate be ? . . .

Maltrana, the haughty, the superior man, whose word was like the blow from an axe, the fervent believer in the joy of life and in its refined Hellenism, felt that his legs were giving way under him and he leaned against a tree.

He was exhausted, vanquished. He acknowledged his cowardice as he fell under the blow of Fate's paw.

Poor fellow ! He raised his hands to his eyes and burst into tears, bleating like a forlorn lamb, whimpering like a child who awakens in the dark and finds itself alone and its trembling hands miss the warmth of its mother's breast.

CHAPTER XI

THE same day of the snow storm, a new misfortune struck Maltrana painfully.

Returning home, he secured some food. The grocer at Cambroneras seemed to take pity on his plight, accepting his promises of an early payment. Or perhaps the inclemency of the weather softened the shopkeeper, and the young man finally went upstairs with two loaves of bread, a bottle of wine, cheese and a tin of sardines.

A regular banquet. After his meal, he felt his love of living reawaking within him. Scraping his pockets, he gathered the last scraps of tobacco, rolled himself a cigarette, and puffing away clouds of smoke with the voluptuousness of comfort, looked through the panes at the snowy landscape which had made him feel so sad a few hours earlier.

Feli could hardly eat ; she felt repugnance for the food Isidro had brought. An uncontrollable nausea prevented her from bringing it to her mouth, and she again relapsed into immobility, into an exhaustion which made her appear unconscious.

Hearing an anguished groan, the young man left the window.

" I can't see . . . I can't see," whimpered Feli, raising her hands to her eyes.

Maltrana ran to her.

" What's the matter, girlie ? What do you feel ? "

" My father . . ." she said in a slow voice. " My uncle Manolo . . . cold . . . awfully cold. . . ."

The incoherence of her words struck terror into the young man.

Her eyes remained fixed, considerably widened, so open that they displayed the whole of the cornea and pushed the pupil to one corner. She raised her hands to her brow.

"Pain . . . awful pain . . ." she murmured, like a sick child.

She then felt her stomach, repeating the same groans. She lowered her head, as if she could not stand the pressure of that cerebral pain which was deranging her mental faculties. Incoherently she answered Maltrana's anxious questions, or did not reply at all, maintaining a pettish silence.

Suddenly, she complained of a ringing in her ears that seemed to drive her crazy, of an itching all over her body and of a rigidity that paralysed her limbs.

"Everything is going round," she whimpered. "The walls are going round and round . . . the floor is opening up . . . a big black hole, awfully black! Isidro, take me . . . take me, for I am falling down. . . . Falling down!"

In spite of the fact that the young man held her tightly in his arms, she struggled to prevent her fall into the black abyss of her deranged imagination.

Suddenly she gave a yell and began to cry, shouting desperately.

"My father . . . my poor father. . . . Look at him: he's at the door . . . he's coming in . . . he's looking at us; he's wearing a shroud . . . white, white as the snow."

Her wandering eyes gazed towards the door, and such assurance rang in her words, that Maltrana turned around, thinking for a moment that her hallucination was a reality.

With extraordinary efforts, he managed to carry her to the bed and laid her in it, thinking that the crisis was over. Feli continued to cry and Isidro hoped that her tears would relieve the pain that oppressed her lungs and pierced her brow as if it were a red-hot nail.

He soon realized that the crisis was becoming more acute. Feli, stretched on the bed, no longer moved her head painfully to and fro. She bent it over her right shoulder, and at the same time her eyes continued to look towards the

left with a distressing fixity, as if they saw something that struck terror into her heart. Her pupils were dilated; her mouth opened with the tremor of the jaw or shut itself, squeezing out the tongue. The paleness of her face acquired a livid tint; her breathing was painful, brief, irregular, agitated by noisy sighs. Suddenly, through a violent contraction of the muscles of the chest, she stopped breathing, and remained motionless, as if she were going to die of asphyxia.

Maltrana busied himself around the bed, stupefied, not knowing what he was doing, terrified by his loneliness and his lack of experience.

"Feli. . . . My girlie; breathe . . . speak. My God, what is this?"

And he patted her hands, pulled her arms and blew into her mouth, as if he wanted to fill her lungs with air.

The crisis lasted only a minute, but it seemed endless to the young man; he felt an anguish almost equal to that of the girl. She began to breathe again, and her immobility was changed into a mad restlessness. The muscles of her eyes contracted and dilated, the eyelids opened and shut, fluttering with mad rapidity. The eyes wheeled in their orbits, giving forth a strange light, as if the electricity of the convulsions were reflected by the sparkling greenish pupils. The jaws closed forcefully, making the tongue bleed. A bubbling froth appeared at the corners of the mouth and she uttered muffled moans. The body contracted and expanded, bending itself up like a bow, while the head and feet sank into the disordered bed clothes.

Isidro ran around the room as if he had lost his head. Then he opened the window.

"Help!" he shouted. "Teodora! . . . Señora Teodora!"

Nobody heard him. The street, the square, the neighbouring gypsy street, all were silent, covered with snow, not even the black silhouette of a living person could be seen. He continued to shout in the anguish of fear until finally from the first hut a bronzed wrinkled face with inquisitive eyes appeared.

"*Salguerillo* . . . Salguero. For the sake of your dear departed! Call Teodora . . . tell her to come here. My wife is dying."

When Matlrana withdrew from the window, he saw Feli twisting herself on the floor, yelling with a frightful depression that horrified him, her mouth full of froth tinted with red from the blood of her tongue. The convulsions had made her fall from the bed, and she had struck the floor on her belly. The young man made a supreme effort to raise her, and to hold her down to prevent her from rolling off again.

Her breathing became a little more regular. Her mouth opened and she absorbed the air with deep and noisy inhalations; her nose dilated beyond measure and her nostrils collapsed as it contracted again. The tremors abated in intensity; her muscles ceased to contract; her arms lay limp along her body; her eyes showed the dilated pupils, with a dull gloss, like those of a corpse. A heavy, lethargic sleep overcame her.

For a moment Maltrana thought that she had died, but as he placed his ear to her lips, he was reassured. A feeble breathing animated her limp body with a light tremor.

Hearing a knock at the door he opened it and let Teodora and another old woman in.

How much time had passed? . . . The gypsies had run to the house, alarmed at Salguero's message, but Isidro thought that something like a century must have elapsed.

He fell into a chair, as if the help of the two women made him suddenly realize the full terror the crisis had made him suffer.

Teodora examined the patient, while Isidro explained to her, in a tremulous voice, what had happened. She was well acquainted with those accidents; she had seen many women suffering the same derangements in their labour.

"It is heart disease, Don Isidro," she said with the assurance of her silence. "The *Señorita* is such a frail woman that her pregnancy has upset her. But this won't happen after the *churumbela* is born."

She then spoke of bleeding her ; she was quite capable of performing the operation. She had bled all the patients of the quarter with a mastery that many a barber would like for his own. But at Maltrana's gesture, she stopped. All right ; she would not bleed her ; for the moment, there was no danger, but as soon as the poor *Señorita* awoke, she was going to give her a few cups of a concoction that worked miracles ; just some herbs she had gathered in the fields with her own hands and kept at home. Her friend went out to fetch the herbs while Maltrana and the old woman stayed near the patient, watching her in silence.

Feli slept peacefully, her eyes shut. Sleep seemed to dissipate the last signs of her illness.

When she awoke after nightfall, she raised her hands to her brow, as if wanting to coördinate her recollections. By the light of a candle that threw on the wall the shadows of Isidro and Teodora sitting close to the bed, she gazed around, hesitating, as if astonished to find herself in bed and that it was night.

" The *Señorita* is all right again," shouted the gypsy. " Hurrah ! she is with us again ! "

Instinctively, Maltrana bent over the patient, kissing her repeatedly, paying no attention to her wonderment while trying to gather her thoughts.

Helped by her friend, the gypsy prepared her famous decoction in the kitchen and made Feli drink several cups of it.

Seeing that she was quiet, the two old women went away, recommending her not to leave the bed. Her indisposition had been nothing but a fit, perfectly natural for a woman in her condition ; perhaps she had got a chill. She would have to look after herself, for the weather was very treacherous.

When the couple were left alone, Isidro spoke of the fright he had had.

" I thought you were going to die ; I thought I was going to lose you at any moment."

And he candidly added, his voice still trembling with emotion :

"Ah, Feli! Don't die, my soul! I have never known how much I loved you until this afternoon when I thought you were going away forever."

The patient lazily moved one of her hands, caressing Maltrana's hair. She complained of the terrifying form of her fit, as if it had been an action of her own volition.

"Poor dear, what a fright I have given you!" she said slowly. "I can still see it on your face; you are pale, your voice trembles. Scold me for having been bad . . . I swear I won't do it again. I'll control my nerves; I'll try not to let them get the better of me even if I burst."

She fell asleep again late in the night. Silence was absolute. Outside the house, neither a step nor a voice could be heard; the snow weighed upon life, preventing its movements.

It was freezing. A sharp and irresistible cold, the cold that follows a big snow-storm, penetrated through the cracks in the window, filtered through the walls.

Feli turned in her bed, murmuring in childish whispers without opening her eyes:

"Cold . . . awfully cold. . . ."

She was covered by the only blanket in the house and by the little shawl Isidro had bought her at the beginning of the winter. He spread a percale dress and the underclothing that was hanging from some nails over her body, but the flimsy clothes afforded only an illusory protection.

The patient continued to shiver, and poor Isidro, who was shaking with the cold, took off his overcoat to add it to the bed covers.

It was a terrible night. Maltrana walked about the room as if he were in the middle of the street. The wind did not whistle; the silence was absolute, but in that tranquil atmosphere, the cold seemed sharper and more deadly. It was as if the world were dying that very night, as if the sun were never going to rise again, as if the earth were buried forever under its shroud of snow.

The young man went into the kitchen and found in a pan a few embers that Teodora had left after making her deco-

tion. Taking the improvised brazier into the room, he placed it near the bed.

Feli continued to complain in her sleep.

"Cold . . . awfully cold. . . . My feet are like ice."

He took off his light summer coat, a garment that hung on his shoulders—an evidence of his poverty—and spread it over the bed.

The feeble fire was dying out. Isidro enviously thought of the strength working-men have. Had he been as vigorous as a bricklayer or a paving labourer, he would have torn down a door, broken up a window and kept the fire going; he would have defended himself against the cruel night, eternal like death. He bewailed his physical poverty, which added new sorrows to his situation. He was defenceless against the struggle for life; the meanest of the vagabonds who walked the highways was worth more than he, for all his culture.

Fire. . . . He needed warmth. Feli was pitifully asking it of him in the icy torture that troubled her sleep.

Maltrana spitefully looked at the papers and books piled up in a corner. In Madrid he never found anyone who would give him bread, but he always returned home with his pockets full of papers. His friends offered him newspapers so that he could read their articles; authors gave him copies of their books with flattering dedications: "To the learned and notable writer, Isidro Maltrana, his admirer. . . ." They admired him. Why? Perhaps because of his poverty. He sold the books for a few *reales*, anything they would give him, and still he always managed to have books in his house; sad verses by people who had health and means enough to defend themselves from hunger; novels about soul crises; treatises as to how to solve the social problem. Paper pursued him, surrounded him; he had been born to be its serf. Always paper, black with ink, harassing him, shutting off his way! Meanwhile, bread and comfort fled from him, going in search of the numbskulls.

With the wrath awakened by these thoughts, he threw into the sad embers the first volume at hand. The thick

polished paper became black at the same time that the pages, curled up by the fire, gave forth a flame, and a dense smoke spread through the room.

The cursed paper, cause of many jealousies and fits of madness to numberless fools, could not yield even a little heat. And fearing lest the smoke would force him to open the window, he seized the pan with the singed volume and took it back into the kitchen.

Returning to the room, he walked up and down, his arms crossed, his hands under his armpits, shivering with the cold, shaking his legs violently, afraid of freezing stiff.

Feli opened her eyes and showed her astonishment at seeing Isidro in his shirt sleeves. He was going to catch cold; it was awfully cold. What had he done with his clothes? . . .

Maltrana lied with a cynicism that would make anyone cry. He had left his overcoat on the bed because he felt too warm. The night was magnificent; he still felt the warmth of the wine he had drunk in the afternoon and of those sardines, which had been a morsel fit for a prince.

His teeth chattered as he said that, and the poor fellow feigned laughter to hide his trembling.

The cold finally forced him to take shelter in the bed. Feli protested against his intention to sit up all night; she felt all right, the danger was over. . . .

Attracted by each other's warmth, their two bodies clung together with intense shivers. Their breaths, the sweat of their skins mingled, and they experienced the voluptuousness of animal comfort as they gradually warmed up. Maltrana felt the hard rotundity of the maternal hemisphere, the parcel of life that threatened his future. His youth had fled from him to condensate itself inside that cavity. Poor Feli had suddenly lost her joy and her health. They had united believing in the beauty of life, in the eternal springtime of love, with the laughter and carelessness of birds, and now they found themselves imprisoned within their own fabric, transformed into common procreators, with all the anguish of the responsibilities.

Feli was asleep again and her lover meditated. The

darkness of the room seemed to embroil his ideas. Without knowing why, he recollected one of his games in the Orphanage. The boys caught a fly, pulled its wings off and then pushed it along, trying to make it fly.

Ah! he was just like that fly. They had clipped his wings off; they had deprived him of his natural weapon for the struggle for life. It would have been better to have left him in the social depths where he had been born, engaging in manual labour, as his forebears had done. His arms would be strong; his hands hard; he would not be needing bread. He crossed Madrid with the blush of a beggar, with the vileness of a frock-coated pauper, inventing lies in order to live, while the hungry working-men always found a means of satisfying their wants. Here they helped to unload a cart; there they opened the door of a carriage; they begged from everybody, and charitable hands gave and gave, as if the roughness of a manual labourer awakened more compassion. He wandered along timorously, shamefacedly, with the sole intention of molesting his friends with the sight of his poverty, and he heard people call him a pestiferous parasite, while the other beggar was the poor, working-man, worthy of all protection.

Ah! the poor lady who had transplanted him! . . . What tremendous harm she had done him without knowing it! He thought of her gratefully, but he said to himself that it would have been better if he had never known her, if he had never opened a book, if he had passed from the Orphanage to a shop to learn a trade. He would now be a full-fledged bricklayer; his Feli would bring the lunch basket to his work, as his mother used to do; they would eat on a pavement , on a promenade, with no aspiration other than the joy of satisfying their bodily wants. Even the danger of death constituted an advantage. A fall from a scaffolding, the collapse of a floor, were swift means of abandoning this wretched world, getting done with it quickly.

Anything was preferable to his present existence, to his ambiguous situation, without the chunk of bread of the lower classes, or the comfort enjoyed by the upper. He

belonged neither to the serfs who are fed, nor to the lords who rule over them.

He had studied only to be unfortunate, to know and taste all the uglinesses of life. He could not believe in the lies accepted by the good faith of the humble. His education had enabled him to rub elbows with the privileged and to know the opulence that surrounds them. He lacked sufficient physical strength to work like a man ; he was a weakling enfeebled by study, and the development of his mind had not enabled him to open a way for himself.

Poor mutilated fly ! They had pulled off the wings with which he was born, and an evil fate amused itself by pushing him along and shouting : " Fly ! . . . " How could he soar ? He was hopelessly defeated ; down on the ground and with no strength to move. His unmethodical and eager studies had annulled his will. He had spent his life finding out what thousands of beings thought throughout the centuries, and when the contingencies of life called for action, he was weaponless, with no strength to keep on going.

The gloom that surrounded him as he thought, was like a picture of his own existence. Everything black ! Where could he go ? What could he do ? . . . And as if his own misfortune were not enough, love had united him to an unfortunate whose only crime was to have loved and admired him ; he had hung her on his arm so that he could walk with more difficulty, stumbling at every step, painfully tugging at his companion who, at first constituting his joy, had gradually become a chain that dragged behind, preventing him from advancing. . . . He saw everything black, with the gloominess of a wretchedness that ends in death alone. He wanted to die, to be done once and for all with an aimless existence, to put an end to a wasted life, unbearable and painful as a blunder of fate. But what about her ? What about the sweet companion who had abandoned the orbit of her own existence to follow his, carried away by the attraction of his bad luck ? . . .

As Maltrana listened to Feli's breathing and felt in the darkness her body, disfigured by maternity, he experienced

the same remorse as if he had assassinated her and had her corpse lying beside him. He felt the same cowardice as that afternoon before the snowy expanse ; he felt the helplessness of an abandoned child, a desire to become very small, to cease being a man, to turn into an insect, or a plant, or a stone, something that would be beneath the cruelties of man ; and he started to cry silently. He spent the rest of the night between sleep and painful vigil, a victim to his own terrifying hallucinations, until the light of day filtered through the cracks of the window.

When he came home the following afternoon, tramping the snow converted into mud, he found the house upside down. He was very happy ; he had managed to gather a few *pesetas*, but he forgot his joy when he saw Teodora and other gypsies around Feli, who was lying in bed, sunk in the lethargy of a new crisis.

She had had another fit. A weal in her brow betrayed a fall from the bed. The gypsies, notified by a neighbour, had run to her assistance.

Teodora puckered her brow as she spoke to the young man. . . . Don Isidro, the poor *Señorita* was very sick ; those fits would follow each other very quickly. It was all due to her condition, and her case seemed rather bad. According to her calculations, a month would pass before Feli's confinement, but it would be a month full of dangers. They had no money to pay a doctor ; in fact, they lacked everything. Maltrana had to go out to earn his bread ; they could help her a little now and then, like the good Christians they were, although gypsies ; but they could not be there constantly, for they had their own families and homes that required their attention.

" Finally, Don Isidro," said the gypsy. " You've got to make up your mind. Have courage ; I know it is somewhat hard, but I think that the poor *Señorita* would be far better off in the hospital."

The hospital ! Maltrana was stunned as if the word had been a blow. . . . After a moment, he reflected. The hospital ! And why not ? It had been established for people like themselves ; it would be a place of pleasure

compared to that ramshackle room in the corners of which he thought he could see the spectres of hunger and pain crouching. . . . His own parents had died in the hospital.

He spent the night watching over Feli, who had recovered her faculties, but could hardly speak. Her tongue was swollen, for she had bitten it during her fit.

Isidro explained himself timorously, while she looked at him in silence with eyes that seemed to have widened in the recent fits. That was not the place for her ; she could die alone during one of his absences, just as if she were a beast, and he shivered at the mere thought of it. No, no ! And he gesticulated furiously, as if he already saw her in his imagination dying during the night with no assistance other than the shouts and the excitement of her lover, maddened by the misfortune.

" I don't know how to explain it, girlie," he murmured in a quivering voice, between long pauses. " We must have courage . . . we ought to see things just as they are. What I am going to tell you is only an idea of mine. . . . If you don't want to do it, all right, we won't do it. . . . You could go to the hospital. . . . Don't be scared. I don't mean the one where everybody goes ; I mean the Clinic, the Faculty. I have good friends there, from the time when I was a student. . . . The professors, very learned men, would see you. Only a matter of one month, at the very most. You would give birth to the baby surrounded by the best of care . . . better than here . . . you would get better, and then . . . and then we could continue to live, happier than now, for bad luck is not going to torture us forever."

Isidro had expected a burst of tears, the protest of instinctive repugnance, and he was astonished when he saw that Feli's face did not even twitch and her sad eyes remained fixed upon him. After a long pause, she bowed her head as a sign of consent. Yes, she accepted ; she would go to the hospital but she was not as optimistic as the young man.

" The only thing that will worry me," she said, moving her tongue with great difficulty, " is that I won't be able

to see you all the time . . . that perhaps we won't see each other any more."

"Feli dearest!" exclaimed Isidro. "Don't say that; don't you believe it, girlie. We shall be happy again. You'll see how well they look after you."

The following morning, Maltrana left the house very early. He went to Atocha Street to wait at the door of the San Carlos College for an old friend of his student days, who was a doctor and assistant at one of the clinics—Nogueras, a young man of joyful disposition. He was small, wore thick glasses and made fun of the accidents of life, as if his daily contact with the miseries and derangements of the human machinery had hardened him.

He had not seen Isidro for a long time, and when he recognized him at the door of the Medical Faculty, he threw his arms around his neck, laughing at his miserable appearance.

"Literature must be in a bad shape," he said. "Do you want anything from me? Ask whatever you want, except money. You see: doctor and professor at the clinic, and I get one thousand five hundred *pesetas* per annum . . . with a discount. That's to say, less than the men who sweep the floors at the government offices."

The merry doctor stopped laughing when he noticed Maltrana's sad countenance. The latter spoke about Feli and her illness.

"I see, you've got yourself a nice little mistress," the doctor said.

Isidro answered affirmatively. Yes, a mistress whom he loved more than many husbands love their wives; a mistress who could boast of a faithfulness, on his part, that very few wives knew.

"All right, let's proceed," said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders. "And what's the matter with her?"

Maltrana described Feli's fits, making an effort to remember all the details.

"Say no more," interrupted the doctor. "The symptoms are quite clear. I was thinking I would go down to Cambroneras with you to see her, but now it isn't necessary;

that's what we call puerperal eclampsia. We must force the delivery, hasten it, or there is danger of death. Bring her here this afternoon; I'll wait for you at the Office. We'll put her in the delivery clinic. I am not there myself, but I'll recommend your partner very highly to a colleague of mine. See you this afternoon, eh?" . . .

He was in a hurry; his chief was waiting for him in the professors' room. He showed Maltrana the entrance to the Office, a small door a little further down than the great entrance to the Faculty. There, at four o'clock.

And he went away smiling, even his friend's sorrow could not pierce the shell of indifference with which the miseries of human kind seemed to have armoured him.

In the afternoon, Feli left the house. It was a slow walk that caused Maltrana considerable suffering. As he saw her crossing the threshold of the hut, he thought he heard a heartrending groan in his ear. She was going away never to return; the presentiments of the patient would be fulfilled. He was losing her forever!

The hill of Cambroneras, the promenade of Ocho Hilos was a Via Crucis. Feli, wrapped up in her little shawl, her head covered by a kerchief that shaded her eyes, walked with slow steps, leaning on her lover.

She could hardly move her swollen legs. The long weeks of inaction in the hut of Cambroneras had rusted the springs of motion. She halted at every step, and let herself down on all the benches of the promenade, panting for breath.

Teodora wanted to accompany her to Fuentecilla, encouraging her with her gypsy words and gestures.

"Get up, my girlie. . . . Let's see how we take a few more steps; let's see how you can move those pretty *pinreles* (legs) of yours."

And turning round to Maltrana, she murmured with tearful expression:

"The poor thing is in a bad shape, Don Isidro. You're doing the right thing in taking her away."

They passed through Toledo gate, and at Fuentecilla, the gypsy left them after kissing the patient repeatedly.

"May the *Baro* of heaven make you well again soon;

may His holy Mother be with you all the time. Good bye, honey ; good-bye, sweet almond. . . ."

Her last words were hardly audible for she went away hiding her face in her apron.

Isidro hailed a cab, and the tearful Feli, deeply moved by the gypsy's farewell, got into it. The young man recollected the early days of their love, when they wandered in the suburbs of Madrid, hiding from people. Never since then had he been in a cab. Now, all the money he had in his pocket, one *peseta* and some coppers, would have to pay for that sorrowful drive, the last, perhaps, they would take together.

They entered the Office through a group of ragged women carrying babies, and evil-looking men, all showing disgusting illnesses, eyes full of pus, gnawing sores, abscesses that disfigured and twisted their limbs. They waited their turn for the free consultation. A strong odour of antiseptics pervaded the atmosphere.

Seeing them through the wicket of the next office Nogueras, the merry doctor, came out to meet them. He looked at Feli fixedly and the girl lowered her eyes with shame. . . . Psh ! As a woman, she did not amount to much. . . . The two lovers stood face to face in an embarrassing position.

Coming over in the cab, Maltrana had shivered in anticipation of the horror of the separation : tears, cries, embraces, and perhaps the patient would have another fit.

But nothing of the kind happened. Only silence, a simplicity that was more heartrending than the noisiest outbursts of sorrow.

The doctor spoke of the recommendations he had made to his colleague in the delivery clinic. He had already reserved a bed ; he had even spoken to the sister in charge of the department.

" Whenever you are ready, I'll come with you," he said, showing some haste.

At last they looked at each other tearless, without a sigh, opening their eyes very wide, with an expression of terror. They were going to part ! . . .

She took the first step. Oh, the courage of women! . . .

"Good-bye, Isidro."

"Good-bye, Feli."

Their voices were sobs, but they did not cry, they did not dare to kiss each other or to squeeze each other's hand in the presence of that cynical little doctor and of those patients who were staring at them.

She went away along a narrow corridor, following the doctor. Her step was halting . . . but she did not want to turn her face back for fear of losing all her courage.

Maltrana went out into the street, and after a few steps, had to lean against the wall. He felt cold, the cold of the grave, that pierced him to his very soul. The afternoon sun was shining, a sun Isidro had never seen before, a dark, dull, funereal sun, as if the king of day were sending his rays forth through a dark cloth, rays wrapped up in crape.

CHAPTER XII

ISIDRO did not return to Cambroneras. He was afraid of living in that house without Feli. He experienced the terror of those who have lost someone dear to them and dare not enter the death chamber. What could he do alone in that forgotten corner of Madrid, among the gypsy women who would remind him of his beloved? . . .

He needed to meet new people, to busy himself, to forget his sorrow.

After an absence of many months he returned to the editorial rooms that very night. The reporters received him with ironic shouts.

"Homer! . . . Here's Homer again! Long live the illustrious blatherskite!"

And they asked him if he brought with him from the desert one of those articles that struck terror into the subscribers.

Some of them had seen him walking with Feli along the Retiro.

"Say, Homer: what have you done with that handsome wench you had by the arm? . . . Did you meet her in some Greek book? Was she Attic or Boetian?"

"She is in the hospital," answered Maltrana, his eyes full of tears.

His tone was sad enough to quiet his merry companions.

He spent the nights in the editorial rooms. He had got out of the habit of spending the nights in bed, and as he did not want to go back to his house, he slipped into some room in the dark and slept on a sofa. If visitors came to the editorial rooms and it was necessary to light the lamp, Maltrana was wakened like a dog, and picking up his

overcoat, passed into another room or went out into the street to look for the house of some friend where he could finish his interrupted sleep.

He ate almost nothing. Eager for amusement, for conversations that would chase his gloomy thoughts, he joined several notorious drunkards many nights, and early in the morning they could be seen walking with uncertain steps through the centre of the city discussing philosophy and literature in roaring tones. In the midst of an argument, the remembrance of Feli would assail Isidro and he would burst into tears. His companions blamed the cognac. In the future, they would drink nothing but beer.

He often went in the morning to the door of San Carlos to wait for Nogueras. The latter made a gesture of disgust as he smelled him.

" You are in a bad way, boy ; you are stinking with drink. What do you gain by getting drunk ? . . ."

Maltrana answered him ill-naturedly. He was asking advice ; all he wanted was to know Feli's condition.

The young doctor became impatient. Did Maltrana think that he had nothing else to do ? . . .

" Just think of it, with a salary of only six thousand *reales !* . . . I have to visit lots of people, and many of them don't pay me very well. Besides, that girl is not in my clinic. . . . I saw her the day before yesterday. She looked all right ; if the eclampsia attacks return, she may die in one of them. They are going to provoke the delivery ; perhaps they'll save her that way."

On the following day, it was Nogueras who spoke first on seeing him.

" You are a father ; the sisters upstairs have a boy for you. His health is good and the mother did not have a bad time at all. If you don't want the second edition of your worthy self to go to the Orphanage, you had better take the kid with you as soon as you can."

Maltrana experienced no emotion. He thought only of going to Carolinas and acquainting his grandmother with the news. What could he do with the child ? Señora Eusebia would take care of him.

And the grandmother, deeply moved by the event, went down to Madrid, accompanied by another woman, to fetch the great-grandson. Isidro went with them as far as San Carlos, but refused to go in. He was dominated by the egotism of his cowardice. He had suffered enough. Would she get any better if he saw her? . . .

When they came out, the grandmother wanted to show him the child, which her friend, younger and stronger than she, was carrying in her arms.

"Look at him, Isidro," sobbed the grandmother, crying with joy. "He is an angel! What a darling! . . . He is your son . . . your very picture! . . ."

Maltrana looked at the palpitating flesh, scarcely moulded, that wriggled in the folds of a shawl. Yes, he was his picture: ugly, with the same ugliness he and the young rascal who was in gaol with other petty young thieves had. The same enormous head that seemed to have been moulded by the hands of misfortune.

Mariposa was taking her great-grandson away with her. She would not need to look for a nurse in Carolinas. She knew a certain woman in her neighbourhood who had married a military musician; and now that he had retired, they had a small store near the Extremadura road in Corvos hill. She had just lost her baby and she would undertake to nurse the great-grandchild for very little money.

Before going away, the old woman spoke of Feli. She had seen her; she was very ill.

"How the poor girl cried before we took the baby away! How she kissed him! . . . She asked about you. Go and see her, man; the poor girl will be very glad to see you, and she needs something to make her happy."

A long time passed before Maltrana visited Feli. Every day he made up his mind to go and see her the following morning. He spent the night going from café to café, and the early morning from tavern to tavern with his bohemian companions, always sad, always drinking in order to forget.

In the m[illegible]e went to San Carlos for news. It was enough [illegible]o know that Feli was getting on well.

He was afraid to see her in that abode of pain and have her guess that he was drinking.

"Some day, you'll come with me," he said to Nogueras. "No, not to-day. I feel rather weak. Besides, I am somewhat drunk. Can't you see it? . . ."

Finally, one morning he picked up enough courage; he wanted to see her. There was a certain tidiness in his appearance, as if he were ready for some amorous assignation. He had just had a shave; he was hiding something under his overcoat which did not look so dilapidated after a careful brushing.

Nogueras made him go through the cloisters of the Faculty. They went up some steps, passed through more cloisters and finally the doctor opened a door.

The first thing Maltrana saw was the white hood of a sister whose waxy hands were busy fixing some cloth flowers and a few candles on an altar. They were in a room of whitewashed walls, of a bone-white colour, with a base of bricks, also white. The room was divided by a partition down to the top of the base, with large open spaces between the columns that supported the ceiling.

Isidro saw several iron beds with bed covers of flowery percale, and close to them little tables with phials and spittoons. Standing out on the pillows, one could see women's heads, of greenish emaciation, their hair tangled and dirty.

Maltrana remembered the men's wards. Men were less repulsive in their illnesses. The female withers more quickly as soon as the disease dissolves the fleshy cushions that constitute her charm.

The doctor stopped in front of a bed; there he had the woman he wanted. It took Isidro some time to recognize her. He might have passed in front of her several times without knowing her. How changed she was! Forgetting her sad appearance when she was sick, he always evoked in his recollections the handsome, merry Feli of the first days of their love. And now, seeing her, thin, her features disfigured, homelier and more wretched even than the day she left Cambroneras, it was an effort to recognize her.

He thought he saw a chum of Feli's, a good pal who reminded him of the other girl, of the one he had known in the happy days which, alas ! would return no more.

He stood still in front of the bed in a timorous attitude, frightened by the hairy heads and the horrible masks of pain and misery that fixed their curious eyes upon him.

" How are you ? " he asked in a low voice.

Feli greeted him silently with a smile that gave him a shiver, contracting the wrinkles of her bloodless face, the outstanding feature of which was her chin, sharp as an arrow head. And that was the place where he had kissed her many a time in the intoxication of passion ! . . . Oh, the wretchedness of life ! Her eyes, the eyes of a mad woman, rolling and convulsive, were the only features that recalled her former beauty.

In the next bed he saw a young woman whose hair was wrapped up in a red kerchief and whose shoulders were protected by a butter-yellow jacket. Through the lace of her chemise her consumptive breasts showed, standing out with a slight swelling from her miserable ribs. She was a servant who had given birth to a girl, a poor beast of burden converted into a mother by the passing caprice of her master. The lady's jacket that covered her shoulders in the hospital was perhaps the only reward for her fall.

As Feli looked at Isidro, her eyes showed astonishment, as if she found him changed. Only a short time had elapsed, yet it was as if they saw each other after a considerable absence.

They remained silent for a long time, looking at each other, but not daring to open their lips. Finally she spoke, obeying a maternal impulse. And her son ? . . .

Maltrana pretended he was well informed. He was away, near the Extremadura road, with his nurse, a great woman his grandmother had found for him. She did not need to worry about him. . . . And he had not been to Corvos hill nor seen the nurse !

He then asked her about her illness. Feli spoke in a sad voice ; she seemed resigned to remain there forever, with no hope of going out again into the world. Her voice was

slow and cut up by long pauses ; there was some incoherence in her words ; it cost her apparent effort to gather her thoughts and arrange her phrases.

While Isidro listened to her, he watched the sister out of the corner of his eye, standing close to the altar, talking to the doctor. Ah, those people who lived in daily contact with human misery ! How hardened they were, how strong ! How indifferent to other people's sorrows, which were nothing to them but ordinary happenings ! Their cold glances seemed callous. The contortions of pain, death, everything glided over them without making the least impression, without causing the least emotion.

After talking to the doctor, the sister looked at Maltrana inquisitively. Her expert knowledge of life had led her to guess their illegal relationship, the rebellious love that scorns all social conventions. Her feminine curiosity became excited by the perfume of sin ; her sternness made her abominate the young people who love each other outside the pale of religion.

Maltrana did not know what to say. Sadness deprived him of thought. Besides, he was afraid of the glances converging upon him. It was torture to stand in front of Feli and not be able to seize her hand, cowed as he was by the hostile eyes of the sister.

He opened his overcoat and deposited on the bed a bunch of violets. Their perfume seemed to sweeten the atmosphere which smelled of sick flesh and antiseptics.

" Ah ! Flowers ! " exclaimed Feli in a childish voice. " Flowers ! "

And her eyes caressed Isidro with an expression of gratitude. It was a little bit of poetry scattered over the hospital bed. Flowers ! . . . And both thought of the same thing. They saw in their imagination the almond trees of the Bishop's garden which had witnessed their first tête-à-têtes ; the flowers he used to throw on the bed when he awoke her on his return from the banquets ; the flowers that had seen them in their evening walks, when they went out arm in arm, safe from poverty and feeling sure that nothing could disturb their happiness.

"Flowers!" she repeated. "How grateful I am to you!"

Maltrana excused himself timorously. They were only violets; he did not have money for anything else. Even at that, it had cost him a great deal to get them. They were very dear; flowers were born for the rich, and the poor had to be thankful that the rich did not take the sky and the sun away from them. He had remembered also how fond she was of oranges. He wanted to bring her one, but after going around the fruit stalls of Madrid to get the first arrivals, he had given it up because of his extreme poverty. The violets had taken all his money.

"Some other day, do you hear me?" he whispered in her ear, as if suggesting some childish prank. "Some other day I'll bring them without letting the sister know anything about it, without letting the doctor see them."

And she said yes, looking at her lover with her big sad eyes, while she lifted the bunch of violets to her face and smelled it delightedly.

Nogueras insistently cleared his throat, calling Maltrana. The interview had lasted long enough; he could come again.

Isidro seized the yellowish hand she stretched out to him.

"Good-bye, Feli. . . . Good-bye, girlie. I'll come back."

The patient reminded him of his promise. He was to bring her oranges and flowers, lots of flowers!

The mental derangement caused by her fits made her forget her lover's poverty.

Maltrana did not return. Several days passed and he did not approach the neighbourhood of San Carlos. That visit had been enough to reassure him somewhat.

One night, as Nogueras was coming out of Apollo Theatre, he met Maltrana in Sevilla Street. Isidro was drunk, dirtier and more untidy than on former occasions. One could guess in the creases of his overcoat, in the disorder of his clothes, that he slept without undressing himself, wherever the accidents of his bohemian life allowed him to. He was pale, with eyes deep sunk and emaciated features: a face of hunger and drunkenness. When he saw Nogueras he made an effort to appear sober.

" And the girl ? " he asked.

The doctor seemed pessimistic. " The girl " was in very bad shape. He had not seen her ; he did not have time, but the colleague under whose charge she was, entertained very little hope. The fits of eclampsia had become very frequent, and she was liable to die in one of them. If her breathing should cease for a few seconds when her organism remained contracted after a fit, she would be asphyxiated.

" And why don't you go to see her," asked the doctor.

" Why should I ? " exclaimed the Bohemian. " I suffer a lot ; I haven't courage to go back. It hurts me to see her among those dirty sick women and not be able to speak freely to her. They all look at me as if I were some queer animal. The sister annoys me."

He was silent for a moment, then he added with a shamed expression, wiping the tears from his eyes :

" I can't go empty-handed ; the poor girl wants flowers. . . . I promised them to her. For days and days I have been wanting to bring her a big bouquet, a big one, so that I can cover her bed with it and she'll imagine that a garden is coming to her and spreading itself at her feet. . . . But I have no money . . . nothing, absolutely nothing. I can't even buy here one of those little bunches they sell in the streets. I hardly eat ; I wander around like a dog without his master. If I had not found a friend who invites me to drink, I should have died long ago. . . ."

When he bid the doctor good-bye, he added haltingly, with the laziness of a sick and cowardly will :

" I'll go. . . . I'll go when I have money . . . when I can bring her something. I don't think she'll die right away ; she'll live for some time yet. Don't you think so ? "

Nogueras shrugged his shoulders with a doubting expression. Yes ; she might possibly be saved ; people in more dangerous condition had recovered their health. But her life was in danger of being suffocated by asphyxia at every attack. He could not commit himself.

A whole week passed before they saw each other again.

One morning they met at the Puerta del Sol. The doctor noticed that Maltrana's appearance was more wretched than ever; he looked like a beggar—filthy, in tatters, entirely neglected, showing the lack of the help of a feminine hand that would attempt to make him look decent. Nogueras was in a hurry. He had been away from Madrid for a couple of days on professional matters, and they were expecting him at the Faculty.

"Bad news, Isidro. That girl is no longer living."

Maltrana opened his eyes wide with astonishment as if the news surpassed the bounds of possibility.

"Are you sure? Have you seen her? . . ."

Nogueras made a peevish gesture.

"What is there surprising in her death? . . . That was to be expected. She is dead; we'll all be dead some time. . . . I haven't seen her; I have other things to attend to. But the day I left Madrid, my colleague told me about it. She had just died."

Maltrana remained motionless, his head hanging down, stunned by the news. Afterwards, he fixed his questioning eyes on the doctor.

"And what have they done with her? . . . And the corpse? Tell me, for God's sake, where did they take it? . . ."

He felt an immense remorse for his egotism and cowardice—for the days he had spent like a vagabond, without enough courage to go and see her in the hopsital. He wanted at least to visit her grave.

The doctor answered him with a frigid smile. Her grave was the common ditch where all paupers are buried. The unfortunate girl had no relatives nor anyone who cared to pay for her funeral. Isidro had not appeared to make arrangements, and he felt sure that her body, before going to the cemetery, must have passed through the dissecting room. There was such a scarcity of corpses! . . .

Maltrana did not want to hear any more. He turned his on the doctor and went away without saying good- as if fleeing from his remorse and shame. He wan- through the streets making an effort to suppress his

tears. People stared at him, and tired of their curiosity, he felt a desire to leave the city and walk through the open fields. He could see the houses through the dense fog; people and carriages went by him noiselessly, phantoms. He could not think; he felt as if his head were empty; his temples beat furiously. His tongue repeated very low, with stupid stubbornness:

"Torn to pieces . . . torn to pieces!"

Gradually his mind, which seemed to have gone far, far away, came back, entered into him. One of the earliest recollections of his youthful years, of the time when he was a student, began to shape itself, and it grew and grew until it assumed the proportions of a reality. He could see himself going up a small staircase of the San Carlos college with a boarding-house mate, a medical student who was going to pick up some instruments in the laboratory. Isidro looked through a window. Down below was a court paved with damp flagstones, which looked as if the flood of some bucket fell upon them frequently. Upon the flagstones lay a queer figure of swollen thorax and thin skeleton arms and legs, contracted into a grotesque attitude. He thought that the figure was of cardboard, roughly modelled by some unskilled artist; it was yellow all over and if eyebrows had been painted on it and a wig placed upon its bald head, it might have looked somewhat natural. On the steps of the staircase he saw some detached heads, resting on their necks, but without skin, showing the red colour of the muscles and the dark blue of the veins. Full of curiosity Maltrana had looked at those toys of science. They were, as he assumed, cardboard models for the use of the students. And when he asked his friend, the latter burst out laughing.

"No, you fool. They are corpses prepared for the class in dissection. That one there is the body of a woman."

Then his friend, with the superiority of the strong who wants to test the scruples of the student of books, led him into the amphitheatre and took him from table to table. How neatly those white-bloused butchers could work!

Here, an arm bent on the marble with nothing but the bones and the tendons, taut and clean, as if they were going to vibrate : a harp to play upon at a cannibals' feast. Over there, legs that displayed the criss-crossed cushioning of the red muscles ; bodies opened out, showing the pale rose-colour of the ribbing. That great slaughter-house of marble and glass made one think of a horribly superior humanity, perverted by cannibalism, in which the strong would feed on the remains of the weak. A gesture of hardened curiosity contracted the faces of doctors and students ; the merciless hands, armed with steel tools, delved into the secrets of the cold, clean, anonymous flesh that did not remember its human origin.

And his Feli had disappeared in that slaughter-house of research ! That was the place where her body had been dismembered, leaving nothing but shapeless torn fragments to go down to the grave in the bottom of a basket !

Feli ! Feli ! . . . He repeated her name, remembering the thousand details of their life together. The pink ear whose lobe he gently bit as he murmured sweet nothings ; her little head that in the winter nights sought shelter against his shoulder, just as a timid bird hides its head under its wings ; her goddess-like legs, which she coyly tried to hide when he put on the stockings they had bought at El Rastro ; her belly, with the graceful navel that seemed to be alive when she was shaken with laughter ; the alabaster cups of her breasts, those magnolias of love . . . every thing had been torn to shreds by the ruthless steel. Hands that knew her not had violated the secret of that body which wakened him in the morning with its satin contact when she crawled over him to get up, placing her eyes above his, breathing into his mouth.

Feli ! Feli ! . . . What sin had she committed that fate should deprive her of even the peace of the grave ? . . .

Maltrana cried now, not caring whether people stared at him or not.

He was in the open country. As he looked around, he saw a short distance away the cemetery of Saint Martin.

Without being aware of it, he had instinctively walked along the places that had witnessed the first joys of their love.

He did not dare go into the cemetery. Death was watching him persistently enough without his going to return her call. Ah, how he hated the infamous lady of lustreless eyes, of intensely pale skin whom he had described in there, one afternoon, before the astonished girl! How eagerly he would spit at her voluminous bitter breasts, at her powerful sides, if she happened to pass before him! . . . It was true that in her footsteps life rose again; that other Felis would come into the world, but they were not for him. His own, the one he had held within his arms, would never return. She had been a ray of sun shining through the clouds of his sky, greeted by the spiral of his hopes that rose like a flock of pigeons. The clouds were closing up forever, the ray of sun had become extinguished, and the pigeons came down to the ground frozen stiff.

He walked, as in a pilgrimage, along the path they had followed that afternoon, the eve of their happiness. He stopped, like a pious person, to taste in certain places the religious pleasure of remembrance. Here, he had given a little money to some beggars so that they could get drunk celebrating their happiness; over there, Feli with graceful gestures had given him an orange to suck. Arrived at the picnic grounds, he wandered around so persistently that the owners watched him, alarmed at his disreputable appearance.

Near the Canalillo, his strength gave way. He felt crushed by his recollections; he also was going to die. He wanted to forget; the sight of those places was doing him great harm. Winter had deprived the trees of their leaves; the earth was cold. It was the background of his happiness, just as he was the same Maltrana; but an icy blast had blown over it, killing the merry thickets, full of murmurs and warblings, leaving only the bare branches. The almond trees of the Bishop's garden, which erstwhile had showered their flowers over Feli's head, looked like brooms planted by the handle.

Isidro, staggering as if he were wounded, went in search of his grandmother.

Zarathustra and Señora Eusebia silently listened to him but without sharing in his sorrow. So, Mosco's daughter was dead? All for the glory of God. And the two fossils fell back upon their egotism, feeling stronger and happier with the satisfaction that they still preserved their lives while death fed upon younger folks.

Mariposa thought of nothing but her great-grandson, of whose health she spoke very highly. She cared nothing about the fate of the mother; all her attention was riveted upon the little one.

Isidro stayed with them. Where could he go? . . . His cowardly laxity had reached the utmost bounds of indifference. He had reached the moment of the great renunciations in life. Had he been a believer, he would have become a hermit, lay brother of a convent, ascetic in a desert. Now he understood the flight from the world, the cruel isolation, the holy fits of madness of some desperate men who, bitten by pain, find a remedy for their sorrow in their ignorance and their faith.

He remained several days in Zarathustra's hut, rejoicing in its filth, making a mortification out of it.

Ah, the conscience! The crushing weight of remorse! He no longer felt any sorrow at Feli's death. What filled him with shame was the utter abandonment in which he had left her; the cowardice of his weak will; his egotism at not feeling sad when he saw her ill . . . . The poor girl had died in that white stable, surrounded by human beasts who only thought of her with the egotism of pain, without a word of love, without a hand that would hold her hand! And that crime was beyond redress! Ah, if Feli could come back to life for a day, for an hour! It was his fixed, stubborn idea. . . . If she could come back to life, even if she were to die again a few months afterwards! He would do his duty and would feel calmer; the Passion of her life would have a worthy ending. He would run to her side and would not leave her until the last moment. He felt capable of stealing so that her remains would rest in a

beautiful tomb, so that they would not go to the common ditch, so that they would not be taken to that white slaughter-house where corpses were cut to pieces. . . . But, alas! we die only once. The crime was beyond redress. Woe to him! Where was the poetry of his love? What was there in common between him and those lovers he had seen in books, leaning over the death-beds of their brides, embracing them and sobbing a last good-bye? . . . Feli! Feli! In exchange for his own life, he begged that she would return for a moment, just enough to be kissed, so that she could depart with the conviction that he loved her, just so that he could save her beloved body from the horrible profanation.

It was two weeks before he returned to Madrid. One morning as he went into the city, he saw Nogueras, on his way to the hospital, and felt a strong desire to speak to him. He liked him more now because he had known Feli; he thought he would find in him a vague remembrance of the dead girl.

The doctor greeted him cheerfully, looking at him with his short-sighted eyes, while cleaning his glasses. He then remembered the unfortunate "little mistress" very lightly, giving no importance to Maltrana's love affair. Was he consoled? Had he found a substitute? Ah, incorrigible Bohemian! Life was good to him, free, fond of women, and without the slavery of pressing occupations.

He then contracted his brow, as if gathering his recollections.

"Man, a very curious thing happened," he added. "Do you remember the day I told you the girl was dead? It wasn't true. When I arrived at San Carlos, my colleague told me about it. It was a mistake on his part; he thought she had died in one of her fits, but she pulled through."

Maltrana opened his eyes and stood paralysed with astonishment, as if he were going to witness that resurrection about which he had dreamed so often, as if Feli were appearing before him.

"But, is she alive?" he tremblingly asked.

"No, man; she died, but it was one week later. I

thought of letting you know, of writing to you ; but who the deuce can guess where you live, with that wandering existence you lead ? . . . She died ; there is no doubt about it. You are a superior person, and certain prepossessions don't affect you in the least. Don't doubt that she is dead. I saw her corpse myself on one of the tables of the dissecting class."

Ah, Fate ! The wicked and capricious goddess ! . . . She was toying with him till the very end.

The winter was coming to an end. The afternoon seemed like spring, with its limpid blue sky and its genial warm sun.

Maltrana crossed Segovia Bridge and went along the Extremadura Road.

He was dressed in mourning. The overcoat, the hated livery of poverty, no longer hung from his shoulders. Fate was treating him more gently when she had found him alone. He was working; they had accepted several articles of his in the magazines, they had given him translations to do ; he was living in a boarding-house and was able to save enough money to pay his son's nurse. Comfort was coming, but how late ! how insipid it seemed to him ! . . .

He walked along a pavement with a brook flowing parallel to it, looking carelessly at the signs on the doors. Nearly all were of taverns, but of suburban taverns, which were at the same time eating places. " Wines *by* So-and-so." And here the name of the tavern-keeper, as if he made the wines himself.

In a miserable house made of boards, his attention was attracted by another sign : " Tavern of Augustin, *alias* El Bolero. Stews, ten *centimos*." Ten *centimos !* What on earth could those stews be made of ? . . . He thought of them with disgust, but he reflected that at some other time, he would have been very glad to have visited the tavern, had he been aware of its cheapness.

In many balconies there were advertisements of fireworks, with samples of wheels and gigantic squibs. All the makers of fireworks in Madrid had settled in that quarter, which looked like the main street of a village, with

its rustic inns and its dirty houses covered with the dust raised by the passing carts.

Going uphill, Maltrana arrived at the end of the double row of houses. The highway ran out of sight, lined on one side by the endless wall of the Casa de Campo, and on the other by the sprouting rows of a sorry-looking barley that was frequently tramped down by pedestrians. Maltrana followed a path that led to a little house on top of a small prominence. It was Corvos hill, and the house was the little store where his son was being nursed. The woman was sewing at the door under a dried vine in a little open space from which could be seen that part of Madrid which overlooks the river.

When the nurse recognized him, she rose hurriedly. She wanted to bring out the baby, who was sleeping after a night of restlessness and crying.

Maltrana protested. She should let him sleep ; he would see him later on ; he was in no particular hurry.

He sat down on a bench, before a table of bare boards, admiring the magnificent panorama. The woman wanted to give him something to drink. . . . A little *aguardiente ?* He rejected the offer with a gesture of displeasure. Water, nothing but water. And she brought out a jar from the dark shop that exhaled a stink of salt meat, alcoholic drinks and grease. Water was very hard to get at that height. Her husband spent a whole day going up and down hill to fill up a couple of barrels from the fountain at the highway.

Afterwards, the nurse spoke of the bad turn their affairs were taking. They were going to lose all the savings her husband, the poor musician, had made in the army. The houses around the hill, were inhabited by wretches who lived in the direst poverty ; brick-makers, most of them, who had work only during the summer. The other months they spent in privation, taking things on credit from the store. Their only means of subsistence was to prowl around the Casa de Campo, jumping its walls to pick a few golden thistles which they sold in Madrid.

" I have seen a lot of wretchedness, Don Isidro," she

added. "But this is the worst of all. Look at that boy coming up with a bottle. . . . I am sure he is not bringing any money with him. And we have to give them what they want, or else we lose everything they already owe us."

She went into the store, followed by the boy, and Maltrana remained absorbed in the contemplation of Madrid.

From that spot, the city was monumental, superb. Few capitals in Europe seemed so handsome. In front, the enormous pile of the Royal Palace, with its outstanding columns interrupting the black rows of windows. On one side, the hill of Principe Pio, crowned by barracks ; on the opposite side, the dome of St. Francis the Great, and the Seminary. Above, the cloudless sky, limpid, as if its blue had been washed by the recent rains, so diaphanous that it instantly absorbed and obliterated the smoke from the chimneys. Below, in the slopes towards the Manzanares, large masses of vegetation ; the woods of Campo del Moro, of the Virgen del Puerto, of the hill of Vega. The white mass of houses was divided, beyond the bridge of Segovia, and a metallic line, a black horizontal bar, joined both parts of the capital. It was the Viaduct.

From there Madrid seemed a wondrous capital, an imposing metropolis. Between the blue of the sky and the green of the trees, the most solemn manifestations of its life, its most powerful greatness were displayed. In the middle, the abode of the kings ; on one side, the barracks, on that hill that was the Mount of Mars of Madrid ; on the opposite side, the sumptuous temple that seemed to crush with its grandeur the miserable neighbouring houses, and another barracks, without weapons, where the recruits of the faith, dressed in black, were sheltered. Nothing was lacking ; it was a complete picture of the nation ; everything seemed to have been concentrated in the monumental face of the great city.

Below, in the Virgen del Puerto, the beating of drums was heard, and Maltrana could see, among the trees, how the new soldiers marched at the sound of the drums, like rows of ants, learning to keep step. *Rataplan . . . rata-*

plan, sounded the drums, and the Bohemian, in his contemplative abstraction, thought he could understand them. The little drums spoke to him ; it seemed that, guessing his thoughts, they said sarcastically : " It's going to last. . . . It's going to last. . . ." And they told no lie. While they continued to beat in that uniform, mechanical tone, without fever or madness, everything would continue in the same old way.

Then he fixed his glance on this side of the river. Large broken roofs with wide openings through which the air and the rain entered at will—abandoned houses that served as a shelter for the wretched. Near them shone the sheds of rusty zinc and the tin covering of beggars' huts. The ant-like crowd of the wretched was there also. In front of the most beautiful part of Madrid, the vagabonds also camped, the desperate, the abortions of the night, all the mob he had seen one night, with the eyes of his imagination, prowling around the happy ones, the caravan asleep in the beatific slumber of appetites that have been satisfied.

Maltrana thought of the rag-pickers of Tetuan, of the workers of Cuatro Caminos and Vallecas, of the beggars and vagabonds of Peñuelas and Injurias, of the gypsies of Cambroneras, of the unemployed brick-makers of the quarter in front of him, of all the wretches whom the proud city expelled from its bosom and who camped at her gates, leading a savage life, living by means of the art and cunning of primitive man, mingling with the promiscuousness of poverty, procreating on the dung the heirs of their hatred and the executors of their revenge.

The capital, domineering and triumphant, seemed to crush its surroundings with the weight of its greatness. It laughed, standing out on the blue sky, with the glitter of the glass of its great palaces, struck by the sun, with the whiteness of its walls, with the murmuring greenery of its gardens, with the elegance of its church spires. It could not see the famished mob gathered at its feet, the horde that fed upon its refuse and filth, the belt of living dung, of suffering filth.

It was beautiful and ruthless. It pushed misery away,

denying its existence. If perchance it thought of the unfortunate, it was to raise monasteries in its suburbs, where wooden images were better cared for than the bone-and-flesh children of God ; convents of monstrous grandeur whose bells rang and rang in the empty space without being heard at all. The poor, the wretched, did not understand their language ; they guessed how hollow their sound was. They were ringing for other people ; their ringing was not a loving call but an outburst of vanity.

Sometime the horde would abandon its immobility. Those who went to Madrid at break of day would also go there at noon. They would no longer accept the refuse ; they would demand their share ; they would not stretch out a begging hand ; they would command with haughtiness.

And the happy ones would tremble before the threatening faces, the ragged clothes, the glances of *famelic strabismus*, the mad criminal eagerness for destruction. Where had those monsters hidden until then ? What cavern did they come from ? . . . Ah, happy ones, you have lived with them without knowing it. They were camping close to your walls ; they passed before your very doors while you were asleep. You have not seen them because they were weak, because they crawled humbly. You denied their existence because they did not threaten you. You showed them neither pity nor kindness when it was time still. . . .

Maltrana mentally examined that avalanche of misery, hatred and despair that could be converted into an army. What did the horde lack ? Leaders, audacious shepherds who, knowing the road, would guide them to the heights. Ah, if those who were born in its bosom, armed with the strength of thought, did not desert them, ashamed of their origin ! If the serfs of poverty, like himself, instead of cowardly offering themselves to the mighty, offered in their service what they had learned, endeavouring to organize the horde, giving it a flag, melting into one common will their independent aspirations ! . . .

He heard a whimper and the voice of the shopkeeper at his back.

"Daddy, Isidrito! Daddy! Wave your hand to your daddy!"

She placed on his knees the bundle of infantile grease on which the eyes were scarcely marked, like two spots of ink. He smelt of sour milk, of urine, of the strong incense with which the nurse attempted to hide his animal stench. Maltrana deliciously inhaled the perfume. He kissed the little toothless mouth; he had not the courage to wipe off the slavers left on his moustache.

To be a father! To contemplate the prolongation of one's own life, the unfolding of one's own personality, a witness of one's own existence who, years after he was dead, would testify to the passage through this world of a man named Maltrana! . . . That little flesh, soft and smooth as eiderdown, was his own; there was something in it of his own being and of that other flesh which, alas! had been torn to pieces and had disappeared forever in the mystery of the earth.

What mattered to him the fate of the unfortunate, the destiny of the miserable horde and the tremendous conflicts that might take place in the future? . . .

The main thing was to live; he was holding his life in his arms. The heat from the little body inspired him with an egotistic and brutal resolution. When he took up his son, he felt strong. He was like a weapon that gave him confidence and courage to go on.

He wanted him to be one of the happy, one of the privileged, one of the strong. If the world was organized on a footing of inequality, let his son be among the privileged, even if to reach such a position he had to trample many unfortunates.

What poverty and Feli's sad end had not managed, the little child had accomplished with the mere contact of its body. The rust that had clogged his will, was falling to the ground like dust. He was a different man; in his audacity, he despised all obstacles.

He felt capable of stealing, of killing, for his son's sake. He had no other tool, no other weapon than his pen, but he would turn it into a poignard, into a lever, into something

implacable that would serve him to kill and to despoil. What he had not dared for the sake of his love, he would accomplish for the sake of his son. He would throw himself into the fray with the impudence of a mercenary. Good-bye ideals, faith, enthusiasm. . . . Dreams, everything dreams! He despised his culture, but he would use it to make himself better paid. Money and power would have one serf more.

The die was cast. He would writhe in abjection, he would taste his vilification, he would sell himself as a slave so that his son might be free. His fate was that of the storming soldier who falls in the moat so that his brother in arms may pass through the breach. He would disappear in the mud, but the Maltrana who came behind him would pass like a victor over the bridge of his back.

And looking himself in those foolish, expressionless, little eyes, that gazed at him fixedly, Maltrana mentally spoke to his son.

"You will succeed, sonny. I will crawl along in front of you; I will open a way for you through the mud with my tongue, so that you can march on without getting dirty. Be not afraid of my falling down discouraged, or that I may become a coward again and abandon you as I did the poor martyr. This love that has awakened within me is an iron love. I am another man. I am . . . your father."

THE END

FICTION

The Exile	MARY JOHNSTON Author of "*The Old Dominion*," *etc.*
Due Reckoning	STEPHEN MCKENNA Author of "*The Oldest God*," *etc.*
Sirocco	ROSITA FORBES Author of "*A Fool's Hell*," *etc.*
Terry	JAMES HILTON Author of "*Meadows of the Moon*," *etc.*
Summer	ROMAIN ROLLAND Author of "*Annette and Sylvie*," *etc.*
Jeanne Margot	SOPHIA CLEUGH Author of "*Matilda*," *etc.*
A Family Portrait	GLENWAY WESTCOTT Author of "*The Apple of the Eye*."
The Burning Ring	KATHERINE BURDEKIN
Madame Iago	ALFRED TOOSÉ
The Sardonic Smile	LUDWIG DIEHL
The Defeated	LUDWIG LEWISHON
Power	NAOMI JACOB Author of "*Rock and Sand*," *etc.*
Tomek the Sculptor	ADELAIDE EDEN PHILLPOTTS Author of "*Lodgers in London*," *etc.*
Gabrielle	W. B. MAXWELL Author of "*Fernande*," *etc.*
The Wife of Evelyn Strode	LUCIEN SMITH
Sleet and Candlelight	ENID WOOLNER
Unholy Depths	GERTRUDE DUNN
Race of Leaves	MRS. SÉE
After All	MARY CAIR
Passion and Peat	A. DE CHATEAUBRIANT
Hell's Playground	IDA V. SIMONTON *The Novel from which the Play "White Cargo" was adapted.*